

MARCH 2015

7 ESSENTIAL SKILLS YOU MUST LEARN

**BUILD A
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9 WAYS WE DIE OUTSIDE

"MY DOG AND I ESCAPED A DEATH TRAP!"

→ WHY ARE SOME BRUSH PILES DEAD ZONES?

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FIND THE
"FOREVER"
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FISHING TACKLE: OUR BIGGEST TEST EVER

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COVER STORY ENTERING THE DANGER ZONE

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BY THE EDITORS



COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY
NICK FERRARI



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Revealing new research sheds light on where gamefish live—and shows you how you can use that information to put more and bigger fish in your boat this season.

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AYPOINT

THE PRIZE / Bridger-Teton National Forest, Wyo.

Shed hunters line up every spring to comb the terrain adjacent to the National Elk Refuge for dropped antlers. Austyn Hines of Rigby, Idaho, watched his buddies sprint across the snow, trying to get a jump on the competition.

"He didn't feel like running, so he just walked slowly after them and came across this elk shed, maybe 300 yards from the trucks," says photographer Kyler Deutmeyer. "His friends had practically trampled the thing and hadn't noticed it."

BONEHEADS

"Don't get discouraged by boot tracks when shed hunting. Hunters can walk past antlers and not even see them."

—Austyn Hines

Disaster!

EVERY TIME WE HEAD INTO THE WILD, WE RISK LOSING IT ALL

Untroubled days, to paraphrase Leo Tolstoy's famous description of all happy families, are similar in their sameness. Each disastrous day is

unique in its dreadful detail.

Just as no two drownings are exactly alike, each fatal fall, snakebite, and hypothermic coma has its own unfortunate narrative, a perilous story arc that usually turns on poor choices, lack of preparation, bad weather, and a dose of sorry luck. There are few populations of humans who have more opportunity to join the ranks of disaster victims than hunters, fishermen, and those of us who seek the things that can only be found outdoors, often in the worst weather.

We deliberately put ourselves in harm's way every time we leave a vehicle with a loaded gun, or follow deer tracks deeper into the timber, or step into a rushing river with a 5-weight in our hands. That's partly why we crave these places and experiences—because they bring us closer to what matters: taking care of ourselves in places where we can't count on help from anyone else. We are a population of self-reliant, resourceful adaptors who, as a group, soak up hardship and physical discomfort the way a dry boot soaks up oil.

That's not to say we seek out danger. We all know someone who is recklessly oblivious to the perils of the outdoors, and those are folks we should avoid. But sometimes danger comes without us calling it. That's precisely what happened to Jaime Rios, the author of "Unintended Baptism," on p. 40. Rios might have been any one of us, driving through a pre-dawn fog to a hunting spot. A skid, a slide into the cold water of an irrigation canal, a long, harrowing



wait for help that didn't come.

The moral of Rios' story is that he was more or less prepared. He had a tool to break his window. He had the mental awareness to turn anxiety into action. And he had a hunter's eye to help him find a way out of his predicament. He had his faith and a companion, his dog, to not only keep him warm, but also keep his mind clear. We all perform better when we work in the service of a loved one.

The rest of our cover story is intended to equip you with the skills, gear, and perspective to allow you to survive your own brush with danger. It's hard to plan for an experience like Rios', but the longer you hunt and fish, the more likely it is that someday you will have to rely on your survival skills. We hope you are prepared enough to be able to tell us all the details of your experience afterward. Because that's one reward of survival: living to share your own uniquely dreadful story.

ANDREW MCKEAN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
ANDREW.MCKEAN@OUTDOORLIFE.COM

HOW TO CONTACT US
ADDRESS: 2 PARK AVE., NEW YORK, NY 10016; FAX: 212-779-5114

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EDITORS EMERITI **Jim Carmichael (Shooting), Jerry Gibbs (Fishing), Patrick F. McManus (Editor-at-Large), Bill McRae (Optics), Vin T. Sparano (Senior Field Editor)**

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS & ILLUSTRATORS **George Barnett, Nick Ferrari, John Hafner, Kevin Hand, Donald M. Jones, Mitch Kezar, Joel Kimmel, John Phillips, John Rice, Tony Shasteen, Vincent Soyeze, Jeff Wilson, Lucas Zarebinski**

Gregory D. Gatto Group Publisher

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DIRECT RESPONSE (800-445-2714) **Shawn Lindeman, Frank McCaffrey, Chip Parham**

DESTINATIONS (212-779-7172 X221) **Eric Genova**

Elizabeth Burnham Murphy Chief Marketing Officer

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PILLOW TALK

► I have to take OL to task, or at least get clarification. On p. 40 of "The Hunger Game" [Dec./Jan. 2015], you write, "Hunt bedding habitat close to stands of oak and winter browse." The opposite page says, "Lindberg still-hunts along creek bottoms... avoiding bedding areas."

So do we hunt bedding areas or not?

*Ed Arzouian
Lanesboro, PA*

DEPUTY EDITOR GERRY BETHGE RESPONDS:

You've hit upon one of deer hunting's greatest conundrums with no single answer. If you pressure mature buck bedding areas too hard, you risk blowing them out for the rest of the year. If you don't pressure them at all, you might wind up eating tag soup. So what's best? Savvy hunters targeting mature bucks usually wait until the last days of the season to hit bedding cover—when spooking deer has fewer long-term consequences. Even then, wait for the ideal conditions. A good snowstorm, for example, makes a stealthy approach far easier.

EPIC TRIUMPH

► Kudos to Andrew McKean for the short feature "30-Somethings" [Dec./Jan.]. Very informative and to the point, excellent choice of calibers and, most important, rifles.

I was very impressed that all the bolt-actions were of the left-handed variety. It is a bit more difficult to find good lefty guns,

and the only mention of a lefty was in reference to the Forbes. I hope all OL readers noticed this.

*K.E. Canada
Bentley, KS*

EPIC FAIL

► Could you please ask your writers not to use the word "epic" in their articles? Like in the subhead for "30-Somethings." ["The rifles of a single, epic season..."]

I've grown so tired of the use of that word to describe everything from hunts to the zits on these writers' faces that I could scream. Whenever I run across the term in a title or text, I lose interest and stop reading. If these mental titans can't come up with another adjective, maybe you could supply them with a thesaurus.

*Kelly M. Croff
Alanson, MI*

BROW FURROWING

► I am curious about the mule deer pictured on p. 41 of the Dec./Jan. issue. The caption states it's a "Montana 5x5." In

advertisement

New electronic lure may catch too many fish; one state bans it.

A bass every seven minutes.

by Mike Butler

NEWARK, DE—A new fishing technology that set a record for catching bass in Mexico is now showing its stuff in the U.S. It has out-fished shrimp bait in Washington State and beat top-selling U.S. lures three to one in Florida. The new technology is so effective one state, Wyoming, has banned its use.

The breakthrough is a tiny, battery-powered electrical system that flashes a blood-red light down a lure's tail when its moved in water. Fish think it's an injured prey and strike. Some fishing authorities, like those in Wyoming, think that gives fishermen too much of an advantage.

They may be right. Three fishermen using a flashing lure in Mexico caught 650 large-mouth bass in just 25 hours. That's a bass every seven minutes for each person, and a record for the lake they were fishing. They said the bass struck with such ferocity they hardly lost a strike.

In Florida two professionals fished for four hours from the same boat. One used a flashing-red lure; the other used some top-selling U. S. lures. The new, "bleeding" lure caught three times as many fish.

Before reporting this, I asked a veteran fisherman in my office for his opinion. Monday morning he charged into my office yelling "I caught six monster fish in an hour with this thing! Where did you get it?"

Then I phoned an ichthyologist (fish expert).

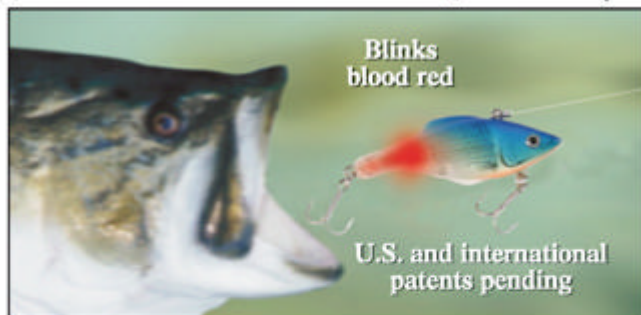
"Predators - lions, sharks," he said, "will always go for the most vulnerable prey. Fish are predators, so if a fish sees a smaller fish bleeding, it knows it's weakened and will strike."

"If a lure could appear to be a live, bleeding fish, a few fishermen could probably empty a lake with it."

I told him three almost did.

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Oregon, we would refer to this muley as a 4x4 or a 4-point—we don't count eye guards. Was this a typo, or do people in other parts of the country count eye guards?

Sam Williams
Albany, OR

**HUNTING EDITOR
ANDREW MCKEAN RESPONDS:**

The regional basis for counting deer antler tines continues to baffle and confuse hunters. In Alabama, that buck would probably be called a 10-point, as most hunters east of the Mississippi River tally all points. Out West, it's a 4-point or 4x4 or 5x5, depending on whether you want to count brow tines or not. My own bias is to count them on muleys if they're at least a finger long, and nearly always on whitetails.

Last year a friend from Missouri called to tell me about the 12-point buck he shot, and while it's a great deer, I confess to being a little underwhelmed when I saw the photos. The buck had "only" six points on each side.

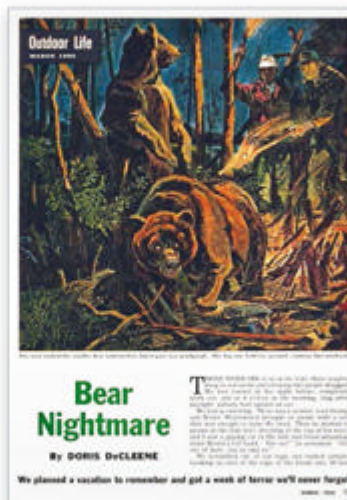
50 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

Our current issue is packed with tales and tips about danger, and it's no surprise that our readers from decades past faced the same ordeals. The March 1965 issue featured "Bear Nightmare," a story of six campers and one hellish week in the wilderness:

We had no warning. There was a sudden, loud thump, and Bernie brought us awake with a yell that was enough to raise the dead. Then he started to pound on the tent wall, shouting at the top of his voice, and I saw a gaping cut in the tent and blood streaming down Bernie's left hand. 'Get out!' he screamed.

The bears came back just before dark...

To read the rest of the story and all our archived issues, visit c2c.outdoorlife.com. You can subscribe or try a free 30-day trial.



WANTED Our archives are nearly complete, but we're still missing a few issues—and you can help us fill in the holes. We're offering a bounty for copies of *Outdoor Life* from 1898. Contact us at letters@outdoorlife.com if you've got the goods.

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THE LIFE
MY OUTDOOR LIFE

FIRST LADY OF GUNS

ASHLEY HLEBINSKY, A 25-YEAR-OLD PITTSBURGH NATIVE, HAS BROUGHT HER ENERGY AND LOVE OF FIREARMS TO WYOMING AS THE FIRST FEMALE CURATOR AT THE CODY FIREARMS MUSEUM OF GUNS **BY JOHN B. SNOW**

When she's not shooting, Hlebinsky likes to hike, camp, and fish.



OUTDOOR LIFE: How did your interest in firearms begin?

ASHLEY HLEBINSKY: It was a circuitous route. I didn't grow up around firearms. When I was 18, I wanted to be a doctor and went on a Civil War medicine tour at Gettysburg. They discussed how the evolution of firearms changed battlefield medicine. I started studying historical ballistics and got an internship at a military museum in Pennsylvania.

They had a Civil War Enfield on display, and carved into its stock was the name of every battle the soldier who owned it had fought in. So firearms became less about history to me, and more about the stories of the people behind them. I got hooked and learned how to shoot.

OL: What kind of shooting do you do?

AH: The first gun I ever fired was a Ruger Blackhawk, and I thought, *This is awesome*. I like to shoot targets with pistols, but lately I've taken up sporting clays. I also like to shoot flintlocks and matchlocks that show the evolution of firearms.

OL: Favorite personal gun?

AH: I just got a Freedom Arms mini revolver belt-buckle pistol that I really like. I also have a Glock 27 and a Kimber Solo. But I really want to buy a Ruger Blackhawk someday for nostalgic reasons.

OL: What's your goal for the museum?

AH: The Cody Museum has probably the most comprehensive firearms collection in existence. My goal is to continue its legacy, but also to try to display more firearms, reinvigorate stories, and expand the collection to include more modern firearms.

OL: Is there one firearm in the collection that really fascinates you?

AH: There's a Colt 1861 Navy, Serial No. 1, made April 9, 1861. It's important to me because of what Colt means to the history of firearms manufacturing, what that model meant on the battlefield, and what it has become in the gun-collecting world. A private named Caleb Sleight bought this gun to take to war. We know he enlisted in the Civil War on May 21, 1861, in a Yonkers, N.Y., regiment. He really lucked out buying the first one made.

OL: Is there a major firearms innovation that doesn't get the attention it deserves?

AH: The wheellock action. It's a neat-looking gun and an ingenious concept, but it was poorly executed. It was invented after the matchlock, which was the first ignition system. The wheellock lowered a piece of pyrite onto a spinning serrated disc to create a spark. It was a huge invention for the time, but it couldn't be easily fixed on the battlefield if it broke, so its time in the spotlight was short.



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No. 1**

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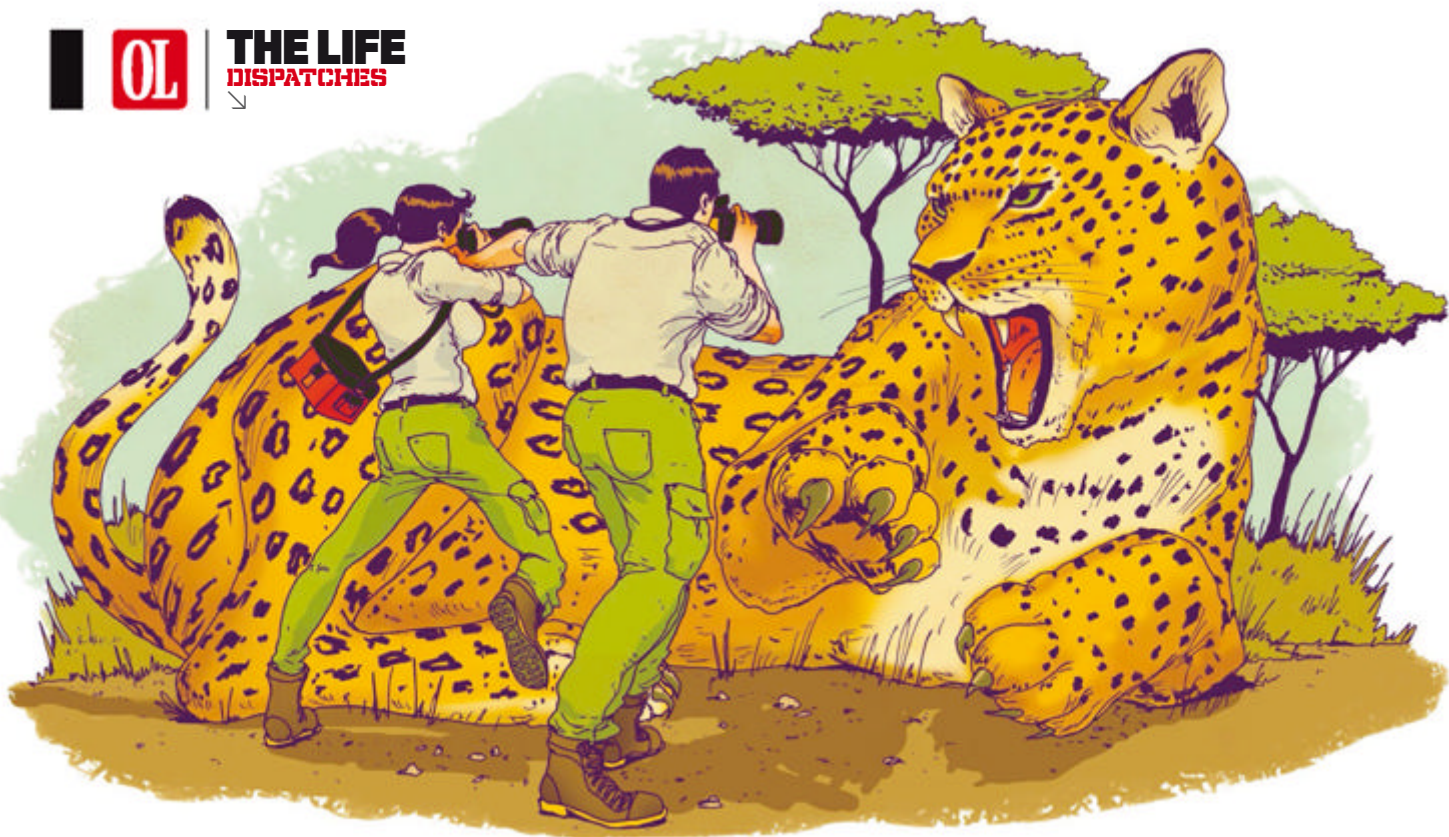
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BY A WHISKER

A FAMILY FEUD LEADS TO A NARROW MISS BY KEVIN “DOCTARI” ROBERTSON

It all started quite innocently. One Sunday my wife and I embarked on an early morning drive in South Africa’s renowned Kruger National Park. Catherine is a seriously keen wildlife photographer, and I’ve come to realize there is indeed some truth to the saying, “If you can’t beat them, join them.” Therefore, I often venture forth into one of Africa’s greatest wildlife areas with a Canon camera instead of my cannon of a .505.

The main roads in Kruger are paved blacktops, which retain heat overnight. Big felines know this, and they often drape themselves on the warm asphalt. So, the secret to seeing lions and leopards is simply to jockey yourself into position so you’re the first through the gate and down the road.

We managed this feat that morning, and soon happened upon a pair of mating lions. They apparently took offense at our photographing their nuptials, and they moved off.

Soon after, I spotted a handsome mature leopard sitting like a dog in the middle of the road. He disappeared into the golden knee-high grass as we coasted down a gentle slope toward him. I mentally marked the place he had vanished and eased to a stop nearby. The big old tom was lying in the grass about 10 paces away, staring at me intently. He reclined there, perfectly camou-

flaged and successfully confusing the autofocus function of my camera lens.

Meanwhile, Catherine was seated in the SUV’s backseat, photographing from her own window. But she couldn’t see the big cat.

Now, there exists some intense competitiveness within the Robertson family—especially when it comes to our respective photographic pursuits. She grew frantic, repeatedly asking me to point out the leopard. I was fiddling with my camera, trying to figure out how to turn off the darn auto-focus while she jabbered in my ear. I became so irritated that I foolishly stuck my arm through the window, pointed directly at the lounging beast,

and bellowed, “He’s right there!”

Now, as you can imagine, ol’ Mr. Spots didn’t take kindly to this. With guttural sounds similar to the revving of a V8 engine (without a muffler), he charged the vehicle. Or, more precisely, he charged me. I stared deep into his fierce yellow-blue eyes as he surged forward. Then he was beside me with such speed that I’d only managed to retract my arm halfway inside the car. It would have been easy to spit in his eye, but this was the last thing on my mind.

Miraculously, the leopard decided he had made his point and ambled off. He stopped

“HE WAS BESIDE ME WITH SUCH SPEED THAT I’D ONLY MANAGED TO RETRACT MY ARM HALFWAY.”

every few paces to throw me the most disdainful expression imaginable.

All told, it was a thrilling Sunday compared to most. And from Catherine’s perspective, it was a just reward for my short temper.

As for the photos, every one showing his departure turned out blurry. In all the commotion, I had finally shut off the auto-focus.



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Paul Bunyan's Bobber

The world's largest bobber presides over Pequot Lakes, Minn. The former water tower is dressed in red and white, and city leaders claim it's fishing tackle from the outsize Northwoods legend.



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WHAT ABOUT BOB?

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A DIZZYING VARIETY



JAMISON'S WHISTLING BOBBER: This float makes a shrill noise when a fish strikes. **BOB-ER-LITE:** Fish-activated illumination makes it easy to see at night. **SHELL BOBBERS:** These high-riding floats mimic shotshells. "Ready, Aim, Fish" is the tagline of manufacturer Fishing Ammo. **NAKED MERMAID:** This scandalous bobber was introduced in the 1940s.



It goes by many names: bobber, bubble, popper, peg, float, or dink.

ALAMY (PAUL BUNYAN); FROM THE COLLECTION OF ERIC LYNXWILER (BOB-ER-LITE)

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EDITOR'S CHOICES ♦ GREAT BUYS ♦ INNOVATIONS

GEAR

FIELD TEST

TACKLE TEST 2015

+ OUR ANNUAL ON-THE-WATER EVALUATION REVEALS WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE NEWEST RODS AND REELS
BY TODD KUHN



O

Over the last decade, the fishing industry has experienced explosive technological growth. Today's bass fishermen electronically see under docks in vivid, three-dimensional detail. Pro anglers pre-fish tournaments on screens from their cockpit seats, practically eliminating the need to wet a line.

When it comes to science-driven enhancements, tackle makers are hustling to stay in step with the competition. Rod designers manipulate carbon on a supramolecular scale, and their work lets us cast farther and with greater accuracy than ever before. Advancements in metallurgy and materials science have produced substances from which smoother, quieter fishing reel gear trains and drags have been created.

Such changes aren't just for show. These products are all lighter and more ergonomic, which means we can fish longer with less fatigue.

For 2015, rod and reel manufacturers have once again eclipsed the previous year's innovations. Here's our take on the best of what's new.

THE WINNERS: REELS

SPINNING

PFLUEGER PATRIARCH XT

\$250 / PFLUEGERFISHING.COM



Weighing 6.1 ounces, the Pflueger Patriarch XT is billed as the lightest spinning reel on the market. That claim can be attributed to the use of magnesium and carbon parts (instead of aluminum) and extensive CNC machining to lighten non-ferrous components.

The reel's low weight is great, but it was the Patriarch's on-the-water performance that turned heads. Rotating on 10 shielded bearings, the XT has an incredibly fluid retrieve. A sealed drag impedes the intrusion of water and grime, virtually eliminating the chance of fade. A solid titanium main shaft provides ample backbone for a driveline that will stand up to any fish.

Saltwater is the kryptonite of magnesium reels; however, the Patriarch's sealed finish keeps its corrosive effects at bay and makes the reel as capable inshore as it is in freshwater.

LEW'S TOURNAMENT PRO TP300HP

\$100 / LEWS.COM



The TP300HP packs plenty of high-end features into a cost-conscious package. For starters, the chassis is made of high-strength C40 carbon, which provides a flex-free platform. A skeletal graphite rotor mitigates the weight typically associated with large-spool reels.

A sealed main body—a feature typically found only on high-priced reels—keeps undesirable stuff out of the gearing, and a threaded lube port lets the user keep the guts greased and turning smoothly.

A large titanium roller and hollow stainless bail wire manage line chores neatly. Internally, a machined solid-brass pinion gear and a stainless-steel main shaft combine for potent 6.1:1 cranking power on a 10-bearing system. A beefy carbon-Teflon multi-disc drag handles stubborn fish without much effort.

BAITCASTING

DUCKETT FISHING 360 SERIES

\$249 / DUCKETTFISHING.COM



Conventional manufacturing wisdom dictates that great reels aren't born—they're bred. It's supposed to take years of trial and error to produce a quality piece. Contrary to this thinking, rod maker Duckett Fishing has struck gold with its first attempt at a reel.

It could be argued the 360 is underpriced, as it has the accoutrements of the most expensive casting reels, and clad in bright-white gloss and candy-red anodizing, it looks as good as it performs. The one-piece die-cast machined frame is rock-solid, and the carbon-composite sideplates reduce weight and tuck nicely into the palm.

Eleven ball bearings and a finely meshed gear train produce smooth cranking, while a capable carbon-based drag offers up to 14 pounds of resistance. Available in 5.3:1, 6.3:1, and 7.1:1 retrieves, there's a 360 for any assignment.

SHIMANO CURADO 200I

\$180 / FISH.SHIMANO.COM



Given the Curado's reputation as the gold standard of affordably priced, bulletproof baitcasters, it's likely that there are more of these reels in bass boat rod lockers than any other make. And the latest iteration, the 200I, should continue that legacy.

The Curado gets its iconic smoothness from dual bearings that support the pinion and main gear, keeping everything aligned and turning in perfect concert. A three-level cast-control system lets the user dial up the ideal setting for long casts, while an external control on the lower side of the palming plate monitors casting tension, allowing for adjustment while holding the reel.

Beyond its impressive mechanical performance, the Curado 200I is an ergonomic dream, with a profile that nestles neatly in the hand for stress-free fishing.

★ HOW WE TEST

BEHIND THE SCENES
AT THE PROVING
GROUNDS OF THE
NEWEST FISHING GEAR

Like baseball's postseason and pumpkin-flavored everything, the *Outdoor Life* Tackle Test has become a rite of October. Once again last fall we ventured south to Cajun Fishing Adventures in Buras, Louisiana, to pit the latest rods and reels against the redfish that swim in the marshes at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Some 42 rods and reels made up our largest field in recent memory.

Over the course of several days, all of our

testers—OL editors and CFA guides alike—spent quality time with each piece of tackle and then drew upon that on-the-water experience to make informed scores in 10 different categories. The average of each tester's scores in each category, plus a cumulative overall score, are reflected in the chart on p. 27.

As always, the rods and reels that finished with the highest overall scores were deemed our Editor's Choices, while the tackle with the top Value scores took home the Great Buy awards.





LEW'S



DUCKETT



SHIMANO



PFLUEGER

INNOVATIONS

FIVE TACKLE DESIGN IDEAS THAT AREN'T ONLY CLEVER, BUT WILL ALSO ENHANCE YOUR OVERALL ANGLING EXPERIENCE

1 DUAL MAGNETIC CONTROLS

The use of both magnetic and friction casting controls has been standard on many bait-casting reels for decades. In fact, reels that feature one or the other have become less common than those that tout both. However, the **Bass Pro Shops CarbonLite's** dual magnetic casting controls—in addition to a separate friction control—allow fishermen to dial their line-management precision to a whole other level.



2 TRIGGER HOOK KEEPER

Few things are as frustrating as a poorly positioned hook keeper (see "Our Pet Peeves," p. 26). By placing it in the tip of the handle trigger on their new casting rods, **Lew's and Wright & McGill** have eliminated the chance of it getting in the way when you're fishing.



3 LINE-WEIGHT INDICATOR

Remembering which pound-test line is on a particular rod can be a challenge, especially for tournament fishermen in the heat of competition. The line-weight indicator dial on the butt sections of the **Bass Pro Shops Johnny Morris Signature Series** and **Quantum Smoke PT** rods makes the line weight easily visible at a glance.

4 SKELETAL GRIP

Sensitivity is everything in a fishing rod, and **Wright & McGill** has essentially eliminated the fore grip on its **Skeet Reese Victory Pro** spinning rods to offer direct access to the blank. You'll feel every tick and nibble.



5 CARBON HANDLES

Carbon is used extensively in rod blanks and reels for its unmatched strength-to-weight ratio, but it's also a remarkably sensitive material. The carbon handles of the **Edge** rods allow fishermen to be in constant contact with the blank.



MOST IMPROVED

WRIGHT & MCGILL STEPS UP ITS GAME

Stan Wright and Drew McGill began offering hand-tied flies on their newly designed Eagle Claw hooks in the late 1920s. In the decades since, the Wright & McGill brand has been associated with tackle of varying levels of quality. For 2015, the Skeet Reese Victory Pro Carbon line of rods and reels represents a dramatic increase in quality over recent years' offerings.

Clad in the bass pro's signature black-and-yellow motif, the rods impressed with their ability to adeptly finesse baits one minute and whip giant redfish the next. The line includes 10 technique-specific offerings; we tested the 6-foot 11-inch Shakey Head/Finesse Worm spinning rod (medium-fast action) and the 7-foot Spinner Bait/Worm casting rod (fast action).

The reels, with their extensive use of carbon, were rigid and virtually devoid of flex, their retrieves were silky, and their drags were more than capable of managing stubborn fish. We tested the size-30 spinning reel and the 6.4:1 caster.



BOUTIQUE TACKLE

SMALL MANUFACTURERS THAT MAKE BIG-TIME RODS AND REELS

1 Searching for a workhorse spinning rod? Look no further than the **Sewell S1 In-shore** (\$140; SEWELLRODS.COM). The 7-footer (medium action with a fast taper) sports a MicroWave guide system and is capable of throwing lures weighing between $\frac{3}{8}$ and 1 ounce on 10- to 20-pound-test line.

2 **13 Fishing**—a company that got its start making fishing rod components—has produced one of the finest baitcasting reels on the market: the **Concept E** (\$380; 13FISHING.COM). Ceramic spool bearings spin in perfect concert as a six-way centrifugal cast control feathers line fluidly.

3 **Fitzgerald Rods** offers a multipurpose 7-foot spinner that impressed with its versatility. The **Stunner HD** (\$170; FITZGERALDRODS.COM), with its medium action and $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{5}{8}$ -ounce rating (6- to 12-pound-test), is an all-day fishing machine.

4 **Duckett Fishing's** line of super-popular rods has made them a top semi-custom rod builder. Their new **Duckett 360** baitcaster is proof they're serious about the reel game, too (see "The Winners," p. 20).

5 The new **Edge** brand of rods is the latest brainchild of legendary rod maker Gary Loomis. Handmade in the U.S., the **First Strike** (\$400; EDGERODS.COM) and **Black Widow** (\$550) lines include a combined 16 rods that feature nothing but state-of-the-art materials.

KISTLER



G.LOOMIS



MEGABASS



NO. 8 TACKLE



THE WINNERS: RODS

SPINNING

MEGABASS STINGER SHOT

\$275 / MEGABASSUSA.COM



The Orochi XX Stinger Shot might be the finest finesse spinning rod ever crafted. It controls baits like it's an extension of the angler's arm, and it helps him systematically carve up a piece of water with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel.

When working finesse-style baits, feel is key and the blank dictates performance. No spinning rod that we've tested in recent years has the sensitivity of the Stinger Shot. The low-resin, four-axis butt-to-midsection carbon wrap provides a solid foundation for managing husky fish, while the ultrafast taper provides real-time lure feedback. Billed as a "drop-shot" rod, the Stinger Shot is perfectly suited for any light-lining assignment and is sure to impress even the most discerning angler.

NO. 8 TACKLE HELLBENT INSHORE

\$60 / NO8TACKLE.COM



Newcomer No. 8 is the budget-minded sister brand of 13 Fishing, and their HellBent Inshore rod is built for the serious angler who isn't flush with cash. Quality components abound, starting with a delightful 24-ton graphite blank that has ample backbone to muscle fish, yet a light tip that induces strikes with an enticing twitch.

The soft-touch reel seat is thoughtfully shaped to comfortably accommodate fingers, and a full-length cork handle is perfect for throwing large lures to hungry fish (interestingly, the rod is rated for $\frac{3}{8}$ - to $\frac{3}{4}$ -ounce baits despite its medium action). Nine black, single-foot stainless-steel guides with tough zirconium inserts keep the line running true. For just \$60, the HellBent is a heck of a lot of rod.

BAITCASTING

G. LOOMIS IMX

\$295 / GLOOMIS.COM



Introduced some three decades ago, the IMX comes in an astounding 38 models designed for every technique imaginable, from shaky heads to punching.

Today's IMX is 15 percent lighter than previous builds, and is well appointed with top-shelf components like Fuji K-Frame running guides (which reduce weight while improving rod balance) and an ACS-II reel seat that offers great feel.

A slender, full-length grade-A cork grip gives the rod a retro feel and is large enough for comfortable two-handed casts. Manufactured in the U.S., the IMX has a rich, dipped finish, and gorgeous guide wraps that are a testament to G.Loomis' enduring commitment to quality. A limited lifetime warranty makes this a solid investment.

KISTLER MAGNESIUM TS

\$160 / KISTLERRODS.COM



Trey Kistler has been producing high-quality semi-custom and custom rods for years. The Magnesium TS (Technique Specific) delivers that same Kistler quality, but at a very palatable price. Despite its stout appearance, the rod is all-day light and possesses a delicate balance and sublime action. The light tip shines, offering plenty of give when coaxing heavy fish buttoned to light-gauge wire hooks.

The Magnesium TS's blank is super responsive, bringing baits to life in the water and perfectly telegraphing their behavior back to the angler. While these rods are advertised as technique-specific, they are in fact extremely versatile. The crankbait rod we tested would be equally capable of throwing shaky heads, light Carolina rigs, or jerkbaits.

BALANCE ON A BUDGET

THREE PERFECTLY MATCHED—AND PRICED—ROD-AND-REEL PAIRINGS

1 NO. 8 BLACKOUT AND DAIWA AIRD The Blackout's (\$80; no8tackle.com) medium action and fast taper (rated for 10- to 17-pound-test and $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{3}{8}$ -ounce lures) give it a "just-right" feel that's perfect for crankbaits, jerkbaits, weightless soft plastics, and light blade baits. The AIRD (\$80; daiwa.com) syncs with it nicely, providing a utilitarian 6.3:1 retrieve. Dual casting controls, an oversize handle, and a stout drag round out a solid, value-packed reel.

2 ST. CROIX TRIUMPH X AND BASS PRO SHOPS PRO QUALIFIER Here's a versatile rig for a wide range of techniques, from crawling soft plastics to twitching topwaters to yanking jerkbaits. The 7-foot medium-action Triumph X (\$100; stcroixrods.com) carries the aspirational St. Croix moniker at an attainable price. The Pro Qualifier (\$80; basspro.com) comes with two spools—great for quickly changing line style or poundage as the situation dictates.

3 LAMIGLAS EXCEL II AND OKUMA CERROS The quality EXCEL II (\$120; lamiglas.com) features an 11-piece guide train, a comfortable split grip, and a soft action. The Cerros (\$120; okumafishing.com) boasts a fast 7.3:1 retrieve and a capable drag. The rod's gentle action, matched with the reel's speedy retrieve, results in a combo that is great for burning lippled or lipless crankbaits when searching for active fish, or for pulling buzzbaits.





OUR PET PEEVES

PESKY DESIGN FLAWS THAT WE WISH WOULD GO AWAY

After literally hundreds of hours testing tackle over the years, we've assembled a list of tackle design gripes. To wit:

✖ EXPOSED THREADS

Nothing is more distracting when fighting a fish than a fistful of reel-seat threads. Is it so difficult to cover the fore part of the reel seat with EVA or cork?

✖ OVERSIZE SPOOLS

Do we really need a spool that holds 200-plus yards of very expensive line? And since when do the fish these reels are designed to fight make runs the length of two football fields? The drag is your friend, people. Learn to use it.

✖ IRKSOME CASTING SPOOLS

Too many baitcasting reels lack a place on the spool to tie off the line. Please, designers of reels, either wrap the spool with a strip of rubber or drill two holes through which we can thread our line.

✖ INACCURATE ROD RATINGS

Without fail, in every Tackle Test there's at least one rod (though usually more) that's rated medium but fishes like a flipping stick.

✖ ILL-PLACED HOOK KEEPERS

We've suffered more than a few sliced fingers over the years as a result of sharp, badly placed hook keepers.



ACTION VS. POWER

ROD-RATING TERMINOLOGY EXPLAINED

When it comes to rod ratings, many anglers erroneously use the terms "action" and "power" interchangeably.

A rod's action describes where a rod bends when weight is imparted on the tip. A rod that is described as "fast" bends in the top third of the blank (and an "extra-fast" rod bends even higher). Medium-action rods bend in the top half or so, while slow-action rods bend along the entire length of the blank, starting in the lower third. The Edge First Strike, with a nimble tip living up to its "extra fast" rating, had the truest action of our test rods.

"Power" describes a rod's lifting strength, and the rating is typically either heavy, medium-heavy, medium, medium-light, or light. A rod's power correlates to its suggested line weight (e.g., heavy rods work best with heavier pound-test line). Daiwa's Zillion rods, with their radially wrapped, heavy-power blanks, could probably lift a piano out of the Mariana Trench.



STELLAAAAA!

THE ULTIMATE "MONEY IS NO OBJECT" FISHING REEL

➔ Including the Shimano Stella FI in our field of spinning reels would have been like testing a Bugatti Veyron against mid-size sedans. However, this marvel of engineering (priced like a work of fine art at \$790) deserves a few words.

Seeking unparalleled smoothness, project engineers placed bearings on or polished every friction-producing surface in the reel, resulting in a nearly effortless retrieve. Meanwhile, the reinforced frame eliminates power-robbing flexure when fighting fish. Oversize, precision-ground polished gears transfer power from the handle through the transmission with no energy loss, thanks to the seemingly impossibly tight tolerances and fit. Large drag washers support the spool, while a proprietary wave spring applies consistent pressure. The result is absurdly good resolution across the full drag friction curve for the best payout system you'll find on a spinner. Twelve triple-containment gaskets seal the reel, keeping out any water and crud that could negatively affect performance.

The bottom line: The Shimano Stella is liquid-metal smooth and, without question, the finest spinning reel money can buy.



SPINNING REELS	PRICE	CONTROLS	DURABILITY	APPLICABILITY	ERGONOMICS	FISHABILITY	MATERIALS	CONSTRUCTION	AESTHETICS	INNOVATION	VALUE	OVERALL
PFLUEGER PATRIARCH XT EDITOR'S CHOICE	\$250	8.2	8.2	8.6	8.4	8.8	8.6	8.2	8.6	6.8	7.6	82
DAIWA BALLISTIC EX	\$200	7.8	7.6	7.8	7.8	7.8	8	8	8	6.6	6.4	75.8
WRIGHT & MCGILL SKEET REESE VICTORY PRO CARBON	\$160	7.2	7	7.4	6.8	7	7.2	7.2	7.8	6.6	7.4	71.6
QUANTUM SMOKE SPEED FREAK	\$179	6.4	6.2	6	7	6.2	7	6.8	7.8	5.8	6	65.2
LEW'S TOURNAMENT PRO TP300HP GREAT BUY	\$100	6.6	6.4	6.3	6	5.8	6.2	6.4	6.2	5.6	9	64.5
BASS PRO SHOPS PRO QUALIFIER	\$80	6.6	6.6	6.6	6.4	6.4	6	6.2	5.8	5	8.4	64

BAITCASTING REELS	PRICE	CONTROLS	DURABILITY	APPLICABILITY	ERGONOMICS	FISHABILITY	MATERIALS	CONSTRUCTION	AESTHETICS	INNOVATION	VALUE	OVERALL
DUCKETT FISHING 360 SERIES EDITOR'S CHOICE	\$249	8.8	8.5	8.8	9	9.3	8.8	9	9	7.8	8.2	87.2
SHIMANO CURADO 200I GREAT BUY	\$180	8.4	8.6	9	9.2	8.8	8.8	9	8.5	8	8.6	86.9
13 FISHING CONCEPT E	\$380	7.8	7.9	8.4	8.8	9.4	8.7	8.8	8.8	9	7	84.6
DAIWA AIRD	\$80	7.7	7.6	7.8	7.7	7.3	7.5	7.3	7.8	6	8.4	75.1
BASS PRO SHOPS CARBONLITE	\$130	7.4	7	7.4	7.6	7.2	7	7	7	7	7.8	72.4
WRIGHT & MCGILL SKEET REESE VICTORY PRO CARBON	\$160	7.2	6.8	7.2	7.2	7	7	6.8	7.2	5.8	7	69.2
OKUMA CERROS	\$100	7	6.4	6.8	6.8	6.8	7	6.8	6.8	5.8	7.8	68
LEW'S LITE SPEED SPOOL TFS	\$240	7.2	6.8	7	7	7	7	6.8	6.2	5.8	6.4	67.2
CABELA'S VERANO	\$150	6.8	6.6	6.6	7	6.6	6.6	6.8	6.8	5.6	7.2	66.6
ABU GARCIA REVO BEAST	\$350	7	6.4	7.4	6.6	6.6	6.8	6.8	7.2	5.8	5.6	66.2

SPINNING RODS	PRICE	ACTION	DURABILITY	APPLICABILITY	ERGONOMICS	FISHABILITY	MATERIALS	CONSTRUCTION	AESTHETICS	INNOVATION	VALUE	OVERALL
MEGABASS OROCHI XX STINGER SHOT EDITOR'S CHOICE	\$275	9.6	8.8	9	9.2	9	9.2	9.2	9	8.6	7.8	89.4
NO. 8 TACKLE HELLBENT INSHORE GREAT BUY	\$60	8.4	8.8	7.8	8	8.2	8.2	8.2	8.4	6.4	9.8	82.2
SHIMANO CRUCIAL DROP SHOT	\$180	8.2	8.4	8.4	8	8.4	8.2	8.4	8.4	6.8	7.6	80.8
EDGE BLACK WIDOW	\$550	8	7.2	7.8	8.2	7.2	8.2	7.8	8	7.8	6.8	77
DUCKETT MICRO MAGIC PRO	\$159	7.6	7.8	7.6	8.2	7.6	7.6	7.8	8.2	6.4	7.4	76.2
LAMIGALS XLS	\$230	8	7.6	8	6.8	8	7.4	7.2	7.6	6.2	6.4	73.2
ST. CROIX TRIUMPH X	\$100	7.4	7.4	7.6	7	7.2	7.4	7.4	7.2	6.2	8.4	73.2
FITZGERALD STUNNER HD	\$170	7.4	7.6	7.4	7	7	7.4	7.2	7.2	6	7	71.2
SEWELL S1 INSHORE	\$140	6.2	7.2	7	7.2	7.8	7.6	7.4	7.4	6.2	7.2	71.2
WRIGHT & MCGILL SKEET REESE VICTORY PRO CARBON SHAKEY HEAD/FINESSE WORM	\$160	8.2	7	7.2	7	7.4	7.4	7	7	6.4	6.6	71.2
QUANTUM SMOKE PT	\$140	7	7	7	7	6.8	7	6.6	8.2	7.2	7	70.8
DENALI J2 DROPSHOT	\$99	7.4	7	7.4	7.2	7.2	6.8	6.8	6.6	5.8	7.4	69.6
BASS PRO SHOPS JOHNNY MORRIS SIGNATURE SERIES	\$150	7	6.6	6.6	7	7	7.2	7	7.2	5.6	6.6	67.8

BAITCASTING RODS	PRICE	ACTION	DURABILITY	APPLICABILITY	ERGONOMICS	FISHABILITY	MATERIALS	CONSTRUCTION	AESTHETICS	INNOVATION	VALUE	OVERALL
G.LOOMIS IMX 803C JWR EDITOR'S CHOICE	\$295	8.6	9.2	9	9.4	9.2	9.4	9.4	8.8	6.9	7.1	87.0
MEGABASS OROCHI XX DIABLO SPEC-R	\$289	8.8	8.8	9	9	9.2	9.2	9	9	7.2	7.6	86.8
KISTLER MAGNESIUM TS CRANK BAIT GREAT BUY	\$160	8.4	8.4	9	8.8	8.8	8.8	9	7.8	7.2	9.4	85.6
NO. 8 TACKLE BLACKOUT	\$80	8.8	8.2	8.6	8.8	8.8	8.2	8.4	8.4	7	9.2	84.4
LAMIGLAS EXCEL II	\$120	7.8	7.8	7.8	8.3	8	7.5	8	7.5	6.8	8	77.3
DUCKETT TEREX	\$149	8.2	7.8	7.8	7.6	7.4	7	7.8	7.8	6	7.6	75
FENWICK ELITE TECH	\$150	8	7.4	7.2	7.8	7.6	7.8	7.6	8	6.2	7.4	75
OKUMA SCOTT MARTIN TCS	\$140	7.6	7.6	7.6	8	7.4	7.2	7.4	8.2	5.8	7.4	74.2
FALCON CARA ST	\$250	8	8	8	7.8	7.8	7.4	7.4	7.8	6.2	5.6	74
EDGE FIRST STRIKE	\$400	9	7.4	7.4	6.6	7	7.8	7.6	7.4	7.6	5.6	73.4
DAIWA ZILLION	\$180	7.3	7.7	7.3	6.3	7.3	7.3	8	8	6.7	6.3	72.3
FITZGERALD STUNNER HD	\$170	7.2	7.6	7.2	6.6	7.2	7.6	7.6	7.2	6.4	7.2	71.8
WRIGHT & MCGILL SKEET REESE VICTORY PRO CARBON SPINNERBAIT/WORM	\$160	8	7.8	7.4	6.2	6.4	7.2	7	7.4	7	7.2	71.6

OUTDOOR LIFE

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UPDATED WITH EACH NEW ISSUE

GUN TEST ♦ RELOADING ♦ OPTICS

SHOOTING

SHOTGUNNING

DUST 'EM

+ The term “precision fire-arm” tends to conjure images of bull-barreled rifles, but why not shotguns? Is powdering a 4.3-inch-wide clay at 60 yards or smacking a turkey’s head at 50 paces any less impressive than making a 1,000-yard rifle shot? Here’s how to dial in your shotgun—and your marksmanship—to go long.

BY KYLE WINTERSTEEN

TIP

Don’t beat yourself up while practicing with your turkey gun. Set up clay targets at different distances and shoot them from field positions with light target loads.



Properly patterning a shotgun is imperative, especially for lengthy shots. Your mission is to determine pattern percentage and point of impact, and to zero your gun.

PATTERN DENSITY

First, tack up a 50-inch sheet of paper to capture the entire pattern and draw a 5-inch bull in the center. Move back 40 yards, place the shotgun bead directly below the bull's-eye and fire. Some prescribe shooting 10 patterns (each on a clean

target) and averaging the results; shoot at least three.

Locate the densest portion of the pattern and draw a 30-inch circle around it. Count the pellet strikes within the circle and divide by your shotshell's total pellet count—this is your pattern percentage. Get the pellet count off the shell maker's website or cut one open and tally it yourself.

An appropriate percentage depends on the intended application. For example, for 40-yard shots on game birds (1 1/4 ounces of No. 5 shot) and longer clays

shots (1 1/8 ounces of No. 7 1/2 shot), I want my 12-gauge shotgun patterns in the 60 percent range. Generally this is achievable with a Modified choke, though some loads require additional constriction. If you are unable to achieve these percentages, first try a different type of shotshell, then a new choke tube—with a little experimentation, almost all shotguns will shoot well.

"ZEROING" A SMOOTHBORE

Next, consider point of impact (POI)—the center of

your 30-inch circle—in relation to the bull's-eye. Note that POI is most easily assessed with a Full choke. A dedicated turkey gun's POI can be adjusted by simply zeroing an optical reticle or sights, but bead-only shotguns require more creativity—more on that shortly.

Most field shotguns will impact slightly high or dead-on. Both are satisfactory, but a shotgun that impacts low or excessively high (unless intended for trap) is not. Slightly left and right POI are common, but several inches of devia-

Developing a consistent mount, with the cheek firmly on the stock, will help you avoid shooting over targets.

EXTEND YOUR RANGE ON TURKEYS

► **JUST HOW FAR** can today's specialized turkey guns be stretched?

"I'll shoot a turkey all day long at 60 yards," says Jason Hart, vice president of Marolina Outdoor and owner of 17 customized turkey guns.

Creating an ultra-tuned setup is easier

than you may think. According to Hart, the major tweaks include the right after-market choke, a crisp trigger (Hart installs Timneys and tunes them to break at 3 pounds), and a stability-enhancing stock.

"Most important, mount a quality red-

dot optic," Hart adds. "At 50 yards, a bead obscures the turkey's entire head."

A stock with a pistol grip and an adjustable length of pull is easier to wield and more stable when turkey hunting.

Once the gun is assembled, Hart patterns it using a 10-inch circle.

tion are a problem.

Sometimes simply switching ammo is the solution. My Beretta DT-10 hits dead-on with almost everything I feed it, but its POI with one popular game load is remarkably high-left. Secondly, changing choke tube brands can also improve POI, particularly for left-to-right issues.

GUN FIT

If your POI remains out of whack, an improper gun fit is the likely culprit. This can be adjusted through trial and error, but British legend E.J. Churchill found a shortcut: At 16 yards, a $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch adjustment to the stock moves POI 1 inch. Shotgun hitting 2 inches high? Just drop the comb by $\frac{1}{8}$ inch to get on target. Conversely, a low POI typically requires a higher comb. A left or right POI is often indicative of a cast issue or possibly a low comb. For a right-handed shooter, more cast (moving the stock to the right) shifts POI right, while less cast (moving the stock left) shifts POI left.

You can easily add leather pads to the stock to raise comb height. To add drop or adjust cast, use a shim kit. These often come with new shotguns, or they can be purchased online. Do this, and your shooting will be on target.

IN THE FIELD // BUST CLAYS AT 60 YARDS

► **ADVANCED SPORTING CLAYS** courses might present 60-yard targets, but how the heck do you hit 30 mph birds at such a distance?

"It can actually be very simple, but you have to understand the sight picture," says Gil Ash, founder of the OSP Shooting School (ospshootingschool.com).

For a right-handed shooter, proper sight picture on a left-crosser is achieved by focusing both eyes on the clay and smoothly "inserting" the barrel ahead of the bird. For a right-crosser, look over the barrels—avoid temptation to look at them—and again focus on the target while mounting ahead of the bird. Intense target focus allows your mental calculator to process vast distance and speed.

"Most shooters look down the barrel, which causes them to shoot behind," Ash explains.

The next step is matching your gun's speed to that of the clay.

"That dramatically increases your chances of hitting the target," Ash says. "Don't overthink lead or look at the gap between barrel and bird. Your brain knows when to pull the trigger."

Ash suggests a Modified choke and $1\frac{1}{8}$ ounces of No. 7½ shot for 60-yard clays. However, he says that load selection is less essential than proper technique.

Focus on the leading edge of the target, not your barrels.



2014 Deer of the Year Winner, Mark Sharp

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Submit a photo of yourself with your 2014 buck, notable measurements of the animal, and a brief story of the hunt. You and your deer could be featured in an *Outdoor Life* issue!

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MOSSBERG PATRIOT

THE COMPANY'S FIRST DANGEROUS-GAME RIFLE **BY JOHN B. SNOW**

The Patriot heralds a new direction for Mossberg, one that the company is excited about, and rightly so. This rifle is the finest gun Mossberg has built recently both in terms of its performance and its aesthetics.

The latter observation is the more evident of the two. The Patriot doesn't have a typical Mossberg look. I'm not sure there is a kind way to put it, but pretty rifles with sleek lines have not been a hallmark of the company to date. The ATR, 4x4, and MVP Flex rifles, to offer up some modern examples, have their virtues, but sex appeal is not among them.

The Patriot, in contrast, has a readily identifiable classic American look. The company crafted the stock along the lines of the Winchester Model 70. One could do much worse than to mimic the flat comb and other proportions of that iconic silhouette.

Other refined touches on the stock include a raised cheekpiece, an attractive laminate wood stock, and a thick recoil pad that is seamlessly fitted to the buttstock.

Looking down the length of the rifle, another thing that jumps out are the two crossbolts running through the stock. These also indicate that Mossberg is doing something different.

Built for Big Critters

Crossbolts, used to add strength to a stock that is subjected to heavy recoil, are common on dangerous-game rifles. The Patriot is chambered in the heavy-hitting .375 Ruger, which qualifies it for use on the Big Nasties of Africa, and this is the first time Mossberg has wandered into this territory.

I carried this rifle in Alaska on a 10-day hunt for grizzly bears last fall and had no reservations about doing so. Not only is the cartridge an excellent choice for big bears, but the rifle performed in a way that gave me confidence while I crept along brush-choked streams in search of a big boar.

With its 22-inch sporter-weight barrel, the Patriot is light and handy. Mine weighed just 7 pounds 6 ounces unscoped and moved in a lively fashion while shooting. The thick recoil pad helped tame the rifle's substantial kick but wasn't so sticky that it would hang up on my jacket when I brought it to my shoulder. The two-position safety by the bolt shroud was

simple and instinctive to use, and the crisp trigger made it easy to break the shot when desired.

Cloverleaf Accuracy

The action cycled smoothly for me, and the gun fed and ejected

► STATS

Caliber .375 Ruger

Capacity 3+1

Weight 7 lb. 6 oz.

Trigger Pull 2 lb. 4 oz.

Barrel Length 22 in.

Overall Length 42 ¾ in.

Price \$584

Contact mossberg.com

PERFORMANCE

Handling	Reliability	Accuracy	Meets Purpose	Versatility
10	8	10	8	9

DESIGN

Craftsmanship	Ergonomics	Durability	Aesthetics
9	9	10	9

VALUE

10

TOTAL

92



The Patriot comes with scope bases already affixed to the receiver.

without any issues.

The rifle's accuracy is also excellent. With dangerous-game rifles, I eschew *Outdoor Life's* typical 5-shot protocol for shooting groups in favor of the more common 3-shot groups, out of respect for my shoulder. Though shooting the Patriot off the bench wasn't pleasant, the tiny groups it made at 100 yards were as lovely as you could ask for. Group sizes averaged 0.896 inches using three different bullet weights and styles. The smallest group was 0.571 inches with Hornady's 250-gr. GMX round.

Getting that kind of accuracy requires a lot of things from a rifle. I already mentioned the Patriot's nice trigger. Add to that a well-made barrel and good ammo, and that nearly explains it. But another key to accuracy is a solid connection between the action and stock, and the Patriot has a simple but smart way of doing that.

The magazine well is actually part of a large polymer insert with two tabs that jut off it, one that points toward the muzzle and another that points toward the butt. These tabs are sandwiched between the action

and the stock so that when the guard screws are tightened down, they create a solid anchor that binds the two together, enhancing accuracy.

The detachable box magazine is the only part of the rifle I had any issues with. It functions very well, is easy to load, and slips into and out of the magazine well in a positive fashion. My gripe with it was this: The magazine is meant to take three .375 Ruger shells, but I was able to stuff a fourth in there without too much effort. Unfortunately, with four in the magazine, the rounds won't feed. Also, when I went to pry out the top cartridge, I took a chip out of the magazine feed lip. Being a thorough gun reviewer—or a slow learner, take your pick—I did this twice, both times with similar results.

Budget Beater

I'm not sure if this counts as saving the best news for last, given how well the rifle performed, but the MSRP on the Patriot is \$584, which makes it an exceptional value. For a rifle that can take any game on earth, the Patriot in .375 Ruger is easily the best bargain out there.

NOTABLE FEATURES



It can be difficult to adorn laminate wood stocks with traditional checkering that looks good. Mossberg's answer was to laser-engrave the stock with stippling contained within borders defined by fine lines. This solution is attractive and provides excellent grip.



Detachable box magazines are not typically found on dangerous-game rifles, the concern being that it could fall free mid-buffalo charge. But people shoot dangerous game with single-shot rifles frequently, so that wouldn't deter me from using it on safari.



SHOOTING RELOADING

Reload with reduced powder charges and lighter bullets to save your shoulder while practicing rifle marksmanship.



SHOOT RIGHT

Using the correct shooting stances and equipment can further reduce felt recoil and the tendency to flinch.

Sit or kneel:

Hunched over a bench, a body is rigid and absorbs all of a rifle's recoil.

Shooting while sitting or kneeling allows the body to flex and roll with the recoil. A long-legged bipod is a great way to steady aim from these positions.

Add a pad: A 1-inch recoil pad, like a Pachmayr Decelerator, absorbs recoil to the shoulder. A pad on the comb increases cheek contact and prevents the comb from gaining a running start at the jaw.

Double plug: Muzzle blast is the startling part of recoil. Minimize it by wearing ear plugs together with muffs and shooting glasses to shield your eyes.

LIGHT LOADS

MAKE SOFT-KICKING RELOADS FOR PRACTICE **BY JOHN HAVILAND**

Imagine how little a student would progress if every time he raised his hand in class, the teacher punched him in the shoulder. Without a positive response, no student, 9 to 90, ever learns his lessons and in fact will quickly backslide. That principle applies to learning how to correctly shoot a hunting rifle, too.

Any significant kick hampers a student from moving forward. A young hunter who has been socked in his skinny shoulder a dozen times has little focus on trigger control or a steady aim when dreading the impending

punch. Instead, he cringes and yanks the trigger.

Practicing before deer season this year, my son Dylan gripped the stock of his Mossberg .308 Winchester like it was an ax handle, worried about shooting well and anticipating the hard recoil. He relaxed when I told him the reduced recoil .308 loads he was going to shoot kicked about like a pat on the back. After a few shots his bullets started clustering in the sticking point of a deer target at 50 and then 100 yards. Dylan has shot about 125 of those mild .308 loads now, and he's well on his way to becoming a capable shot.

REDUCED RECOIL HANDLOADS

CARTRIDGE	BULLET (GRAINS)	POWDER/WEIGHT (GRAINS)	MV (FPS)	ME (FT.-LB.)	RECOIL (FT.-LB.)	REDUCTION VS. FACTORY LOAD
.243 WIN.	HRN. V-MAX (75)	VARGET/38.0	2,751	1,260	6.0	47%
	FACTORY LOAD RECOIL: 11.3 FT.-LB. FROM 100-GR. BULLET AT 2,960 FPS					
7 MM-08 REM.	SIERRA HPBT (130)	H4895/35.2	2,429	1,703	8.6	47%
	FACTORY LOAD RECOIL: 16.3 FT.-LB. FROM 140-GR. BULLET AT 2,860 FPS					
.308 WIN.	SIERRA SPT (125)	H4198/28.5	2,135	1,265	5.5	67%
	FACTORY LOAD RECOIL: 17 FT.-LB. FROM 150-GR. BULLET AT 2,820 FPS					
.30/06	HRN. A-MAX (155)	IMR 4064/44.5	2,422	2,018	12.6	38%
	FACTORY LOAD RECOIL: 20.4 FT.-LB. FROM 180-GR. BULLET AT 2,700 FPS					
.338 WIN. MAG.	HRN. SST (225)	IMR 4064/56.0	2,418	2,920	24.2	39%
	FACTORY LOAD RECOIL: 39.5 FT.-LB. FROM 250-GR. BULLET AT 2,660 FPS					

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LEUPOLD D-EVO

A NEW SOLUTION TO AN AGE-OLD SHOOTING PROBLEM **BY JOHN B. SNOW**

Speed versus precision. In dynamic shooting situations—whether you're hunting or in competition—you're going to have to trade one of these goals for the other. Often the decision is based on shot distance. Targets up close can be taken much faster than those that are football fields away. A puzzle for shooters has been how to cut the time it takes to transition between the two.

Competitive shooters have a couple of ways to tackle this. One is to attach a lever to the magnification ring of their rifle-scope so they can toggle from low to high magnification. The other is to employ a second set of sights on the rifle that they can look through by tilting the stock or otherwise repositioning their head. These methods work, but both require extra motion on the part of the shooter.

Leupold has created a dual-sight system that requires only the barest movement of the shooter's eye to transition between a red-dot optic and a fixed-power 6x20mm scope. The idea behind it is simple, though the engineering is complex. With the rifle mounted, the shooter can see through both optics. The red-dot is in the top of the shooter's vision and the scope, called the D-EVO, is right below it. Both can be zeroed to the same point of impact, and by focusing on one instead of the other, the shooter can go from 1X to 6X faster than the blink of an eye.

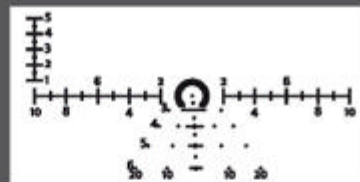
I had a chance to use one of the prototypes, which have been developed in conjunction with units in our military's Joint Special Operations Command, and I found that the system is remarkable for its speed, accuracy, versatility, and bomb-proof construction. With just a bit of practice, I moved at lightning speed between targets arrayed within 25 feet of me to others at 100 yards and beyond. Shooting from supported positions, I used the hold-over reticle in the in the D-EVO to easily hit targets out past 400 yards. The system does exactly what it is supposed to do. I can't wait to use it at my next 3-Gun match. The D-EVO costs \$1,499 and the LCO, Leupold's red-dot optic, is \$999.



CMR-W RETICLE

The reticle in the D-EVO has a bold horseshoe-shaped semi-circle with a central aiming dot for quick target acquisition. The holdover marks are calibrated for heavier (think 77-grain) .223 Rem./556 NATO rounds. With a 200-meter zero, the hash marks match up with bullet drops at 300, 400, 500, and 600 meters. The dots to either side of the hash marks are for wind-drift values of 10 and 20 mph.

Mil-based marks on the long horizontal axis allow for compensation with



moving targets. Those hash marks can also be used to range targets of a known size, as can the vertical mil scale on the left side of the reticle.

LCO

[1] BEAT ON IT

The LCO, for Leupold Carbine Optic, is a red-dot sight encased in a machined aluminum body for protection. This is Leupold's first optic of this kind.

[2] SEE YOUR TARGET

This dial controls the red dot's 16 brightness level settings and incorporates a push on-off switch. A CR123 lithium battery provides up to five years of runtime.

[3] GET IT WET

Like the D-EVO, the LCO is waterproof and rated for dive depths of 66 feet.

[4] DIAL IT IN

A flat-blade screwdriver or cartridge rim can be used to

move the ½ MOA windage and elevation adjustments. The unit has positive adjustments.

The aiming dot in the optic subtends at 1 MOA, allowing for good precision for a 1X optic.

The D-EVO allows a shooter to employ two sights nearly simultaneously.



D-EVO

[5] PICK YOUR IMAGE

The D-EVO, for Dual-Enhanced View Optic, rides just behind the red-dot sight. Its ocular lens has a flat top so that the image of the

CMR-W reticle sits just beneath the image of the red dot in the other optic.

The D-EVO has an offset body that allows it to see around the red-dot sight.

[6] ZERO IT

Robust windage and elevation adjustments move the reticle in 0.1 mil increments.

[7] BEAT ON IT

A beveled aluminum ring pro-

TECTS the 20mm objective lens from damage.

[8] MOUNT IT

Both optics attach to a Picatinny rail with 1/2-inch nuts that can also be tight-

ened with a large screwdriver.

[9] SAVE SPACE

The body of the D-EVO is compact, requiring just 3.2 inches of mounting surface on the rail.



SAFETY PLUG TEST

► These bright-orange plugs from Chamber-View (chamber-view.com) come in three models for shotguns, rifles, and handguns.

THE QUESTION: Can the plug withstand the temperatures generated by a hot rifle chamber? Some empty-chamber indicators can melt, creating a hard-to-clean mess in the action.

THE TEST: I put 120 rounds—four 30-round mags—through my PWS MK118 in the course of a couple of minutes while doing some rapid-fire target transition drills at my range. The rifle was blazing hot when I dumped the fourth mag. I accidentally burned my thumb on the gas block, confirming the rifle's volcanic disposition.

I popped the plug into the chamber, laid the rifle on the ground, and snapped the picture above.

THE RESULT: I kept the plug in the chamber for 45 minutes. When I got back to my workshop, I pulled it out and everything was fine. The Chamber-View passed with full marks.

—John B. Snow

*“My little girl yesterday,
my friend today,
my daughter forever”*

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Entering the Danger Zone



And then, all of a sudden...

As hunters and fishermen, we face a degree of danger every time we step outdoors. While we typically don't actively seek out danger (like those lunatics who climb mountains just to jump off them), we tend to find ourselves in survival situations when we least expect to—as you'll read in "Unexpected Baptism," starting on the next page. Then, we present a stark look at just how people die in the outdoors. But, as you'll read starting on p. 46, with the right skill set we *can* make it home again.



BY THE EDITORS



Unexpected Baptism

I

IT'S THE SATURDAY BEFORE

Thanksgiving, and I've drawn reservation number 1 in the lottery for a duck blind at a decent state wildlife area near Los Banos, California. Gathering my gear around 1 a.m., the day hands me the first of many choices: Which dog will accompany me?

Sky is an 8-month-old male chocolate Lab who I'm trying to give as much real-life experience as possible. Stormy, also a chocolate Lab, is 5 years old, and her experience would come in handy in the thick marsh. Stormy gets the nod.

The weather forecast calls for the possibility of fog, but the drive down In-

terstate 5 is clear. I stop in Santa Nella for gas and lock Stormy in the camper shell before going inside the station. It's a habit I started after I met a sad old man long ago in the pheasant fields up by Colusa. He was driving around looking for his German shorthair, which had been stolen from his unlocked camper shell at a café. I shudder to think about what became of that dog. I've heard stories of dog-fighting gangs that kidnap dogs to be used for practice.

BY JAIME RIOS

As I approach the marsh, the fog begins to build. I remind myself to be careful—not even the best day of hunting would be worth an accident—but at a curve I hit a soft shoulder and begin to lose control of the truck. I try to correct but it's too late, and before I know it I'm in a slide, suddenly trying my best to keep the truck from rolling. With a clang, the back of the pickup goes over a steep bank. The truck slowly slides backward and down, then it seems to splash and become level. There is a series of flashes, clicks, and whirs before all lights and electronics go out. I realize that my truck is now floating. In the dim light I can barely make out that I'm in a large canal. I pray that the water isn't deep.

locked. The water has shorted the electrical system. I pull up on the door locks and try again but cannot open the doors. I start going through a mental checklist of things that I could use to break a window. I remember that years ago I received a glass breaker for subscribing to an outdoor magazine. One end of the tool is the breaker, the other a small aluminum flashlight. I had put it in the center console just in case. I clench the tool and give the passenger window a sharp hit, fully expecting the glass to shatter. The breaker merely bounces off. I hit it again with the same result. To increase the force of the impact, I try a two-handed swing, but I only manage to deeply scratch the window.

TRAPPED

At first the scene seems peaceful, almost beautiful. My truck floats gently downstream and spins slowly in the current. I snap out of the mesmerizing moment and realize that the truck will soon be underwater. I try to open the door, but it's





With each failed attempt, the urgency of my situation builds. Water gathers at my feet. It occurs to me that the rear window might be thinner or weaker. I take multiple swings at it, but the glass doesn't break. It's time to try something new. I wonder if the larger muscles in my thighs might be more effective, so I lie down on the seat and try to kick out the driver-side window, but my feet just bounce off. By this point the truck's exterior is mostly submerged and the water is pushing against the window. The water level in the cab is cresting the seat, and cold water soaks my back and neck. I try to kick out the window for a while longer, but the water rises above my reclined head.

**I THINK OF ALL
THE PEOPLE
I'VE KNOWN,
THE EXPERIENCES
I'VE HAD, AND
THE EXPERIENCES
I'LL NEVER HAVE.**

I sit up and brainstorm my next move. My toolbox is behind the seat. If I can reach a wrench or a large screwdriver, either would surely break a window. Although I try to be well prepared, I never anticipated needing to access the toolbox from inside the cab. While I'm wrestling with the seat, the water level rises to my neck. In order to reach the toolbox, I need to hold my breath and dive for it. I go under but can't pry it loose. I come up for air and go down a second time. In my descent I become aware of various objects floating around me: a squeegee, a foldable windshield cover, a small pillow. The inside of my truck cab has become a giant snow globe and I'm a captive within it.

I try the door handle again to no avail. I continue to try to wrestle the toolbox free, but it can only be removed by sliding it toward an open door. While wrestling with the toolbox, my hand bumps against my fire extinguisher. Because it is made of relatively soft aluminum, it's not my tool of choice, but I'm running out of time and options. I grasp the handle with my right hand and the cylinder with my left and use it as a battering ram. The extinguisher, too, merely bounces off the glass. The water level has risen so that I'm now swinging the extinguisher underwater. My only hope is to weaken the window through repeated impact. By this time the water level is about 4 inches from the cab ceiling, and I have to gulp air, submerge, and take as many swings as my breath will allow. My fear has grown to the point that

**WHEN I TRY TO
MOVE MY FINGERS,
THE HOLE IN MY
PALM MAKES A
STRANGE SUCKING
SOUND, LIKE
SOMEONE CHEW-
ING WITH HIS
MOUTH OPEN.**



it's now approaching panic. A part of me just wants to give up rational behavior and scream at the top of my lungs.

HOPE

They say that in a near-death experience, your life flashes before your eyes. I believe what causes this is the release of a huge amount of adrenaline and other chemicals. My brain is now operating at a thousand times its regular speed. Every thought I've ever had, every feeling I've ever felt rushes in. I think of all the people I've known, the experiences I've had, and the experiences I'll never have. It takes all of my remaining willpower to shut off the torrent and put those thoughts and feelings aside and concentrate on the task at hand.

After I clear my mind, the next thought that comes to me is a plea: "God, please help me." An internal voice responds, "You have a little more time. What will you do with it?" I then realize that the water level has stopped rising and is holding at 2 inches from the ceiling of the truck. I respond, "I'm going to try a little harder." I continue taking gulps of air, submerging, and swinging the fire extinguisher as hard as I can. I do this for probably three or four minutes, though it seems much longer. With each cycle, the air becomes thinner. It's dark and cold, and I'm exhausted. I'm embarrassed to admit that for a couple of seconds I contemplate giving up. Then I remember that Stormy is under the camper shell having the same experience.

I continue swinging away for another minute or two and suddenly the impact feels different. I extend my left hand and feel a hole in the window. I'm going to live! I use the fire extinguisher to break away the rest of the glass and swim out the window. Once at the camper shell door, I twist the handle and am sickened by the realization that it's locked. I've heard that under extreme conditions the human body is capable of exaggerated strength, and I can now vouch for that. I pry my fingers under the shell door and lift with everything I have. The door locks break like they're made of cheap plastic. I can hear splashing from under the shell and call for Stormy. She swims out, and to my amazement, she's clutching a half-filled water jug in her mouth as a flotation device. Stormy has always been a bright dog, but I could never have expected that.

I look around to get my bearings and push off of the truck and swim for shore. I try to climb up the side of the canal but the sides are smooth, wet concrete, sloped at a 45-degree angle. I go back to the truck, sit on top, and rest a while. Stormy has clawed her way to the top of the bank, but when she sees that I can't make it she



comes back to join me at the truck. When she swims alongside, I pull her up and notice that my hands hurt. The tips of my fingers have worn off, I have multiple cuts from ripping the camper shell door open, and there's a hole in my right palm the size of a quarter. The glass breaker had punched a hole in my hand down to the bone. I can't feel or move the middle and index fingers on my right hand. When I try to move my fingers, the hole in my palm makes a strange sucking sound, like someone chewing with his mouth open. In all of the excitement I had not felt a thing, but now my hand starts to throb.

SALVATION

After 15 minutes, it's time to again tackle the concrete slope. It is both psychologically and physically difficult to get back into the water, but I don't have much choice. I try to climb the wall of the canal, but I merely scrape away more of my fingertips and further exhaust myself. I retreat to the relative safety of my truck island to think things through.

The canal sits below the road and is screened by a wall of cattails, so I can't count on help from a passing motorist. I can't climb up the sides of the canal with my hands in the condition they're in. Then I remember that these concrete canals usually have ladders every few hundred yards along their banks. The fog and darkness prevent me from seeing farther than 10 yards. I must wait for better visibility to confirm the existence of a ladder. I had entered the water at approximately 5 a.m. I know that it will be a long and painful wait, during which time I will undoubtedly experience the symptoms of hypothermia.

The hours until daylight are the longest of my life. I spend them kneeling against Stormy to conserve body heat. I realize I need to move my muscles enough to stay warm but not so much that I'll be tired when I try again to swim to safety.

After what seems like an eternity, the sun begins to peek over the horizon. At about 8 a.m. the fog starts to lift. I strain to look for signs of a ladder. About 60 yards downstream, I see what appear to be steel ladder rungs embedded in the concrete walls of the canal. Farther downstream the canal dead-ends and runs into an underground pipe. About 70 yards upstream there appears to be another set of rungs. A slight breeze is blowing downstream, so the wind and the current suggest that a swim that way would be easiest. But I must be sure. If I swim that way and there is no ladder, I won't be able to make it back. I force myself to hold off until I'm positive.

As I'm waiting, movement upstream



THE AUTHOR AND STORMY CONTINUE TO HUNT BIRDS TOGETHER. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN IN JANUARY AFTER A SUCCESSFUL MORNING IN THE MARSHES OUTSIDE COLUSA, CALIFORNIA.

catches my eye. A small flock of black-birds is drinking along the water's edge near what I'm hoping are the ladder rungs. I concentrate on the birds and mentally plead for one of them to give me a sign that confirms my hunch. As if on cue, a bird flits up and perches atop a rung one foot above the water.

The news is bittersweet, though. I'm glad for the confirmation, but the thought of getting back into the water is repulsive. Not only will it be cold, but I'm not sure I can even reach the ladder. It's only 70 yards away, and I'm a certified diver and a decent swimmer, but I'm hypothermic and tired, and my legs are cramping. I start to think that it might be my last swim.

I step down into the water and onto the truck bumper. The cold water takes my breath away. I push off and start to swim. Submerging my head is especially unpleasant, but the fact that the ladder rungs are visible keeps me going. When I reach the ladder I'm too tired to grab the rung just above the water, so I reach for one that I hope is submerged beneath it. When my left hand finds it, I know that the worst is over and that Stormy and I will be okay.

After a few minutes I climb to the top. It

feels good to have gravel beneath my feet. I walk downstream toward a turnout on the highway. Along the way I pass Stormy sitting faithfully on the truck. I don't want her in the vicinity of the highway, so I signal her to stay. I also walk past the location where I thought I had seen ladder rungs downstream; however, there are no rungs, just some expansion joints in the concrete. If I had swum downstream, it would have been a one-way trip.

EPILOGUE

After receiving assistance from both a helpful motorist and the California Highway Patrol, an ambulance ride, and surgery on my hand, I think about everything that happened. I'm still angry and embarrassed about losing control of my vehicle, but I'm pleased with the many little things that went right: I didn't panic, I went through the proper problem-solving process, I had tools at my disposal, I had some knowledge of canal design, I had good clothing on, I was in decent physical shape, and my dog handled herself well.

At the same time, I know I also had some divine help: Little birds to show me the way and the gift of more time—not just in the submerged truck, but also to live.

DON'T BECOME A STATISTIC



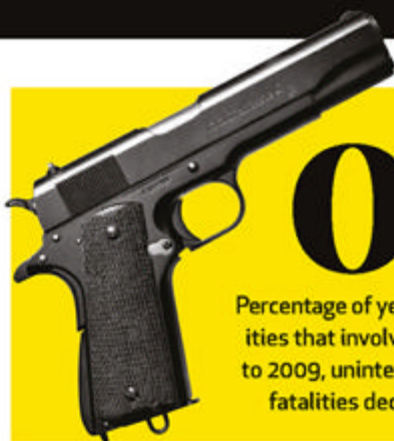
THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF WAYS TO DIE IN THE WILD. INDEED, THE VERY POSSIBILITY THAT WE MIGHT NOT MAKE IT HOME ALIVE ADDS TO THE THRILL OF OUR PURSUITS. HERE'S A LOOK AT SOME HARD DATA ON THE WAYS PEOPLE DIE IN THE OUTDOORS.

1ⁱⁿ 3

NUMBER OF TREE-
STAND HUNTERS
WHO WILL FALL
AT SOME POINT IN
THEIR HUNTING
CAREER

47.2

Percentage of drownings
that occurred in natural
water from 1999 to 2010,
the most of any location,
including swimming pools
and bathtubs



0.5

Percentage of yearly unintentional fatal-
ities that involve firearms. From 1999
to 2009, unintentional firearm-related
fatalities declined by 33 percent.

7,000-8,000

NUMBER OF PEOPLE BITTEN
BY A VENOMOUS SNAKE IN
THE U.S. EACH YEAR

FIVE

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE
U.S. WHO DIE FROM A VENOM-
OUS SNAKEBITE ANNUALLY



20

Percentage of the
world's roughly
3,000 snake
species that are
venomous

75 PERCENT

Treestand falls that
occur while climbing up
or down the tree



ALAMY (7)



\$5,000,000

YEARLY COST OF SEARCH-AND-RESCUE OPERATIONS BY THE U.S. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



3 days

Amount of time a human body can last without water before succumbing to dehydration

16,911

Total number of deaths in the U.S. from 1999 to 2011—an average of 1,301 per year—that were associated with exposure to excessive natural cold

95° F

Lowest temperature that the human body can decrease to before hypothermia begins

56.7° F

Body temperature of Swede Anna Bågenholm, who survived after being trapped under a layer of ice for 80 minutes in 1999



165

51

AVERAGE NUMBER OF LIGHTNING FATALITIES IN THE U.S. PER YEAR FROM 1984 TO 2013. A RECORD LOW OF 23 OCCURRED IN 2013. AMONG THE 261 PEOPLE KILLED BY LIGHTNING BETWEEN 2006 AND 2013, FISHERMEN ACCOUNTED FOR MORE THAN THREE TIMES AS MANY AS GOLFERS. CAMPING AND BOATING EACH HAD ALMOST TWICE AS MANY DEATHS AS GOLF.



1 in 12,000

THE ODDS OF BEING STRUCK BY LIGHTNING IN A LIFETIME



55

NUMBER OF PEOPLE KILLED BY A WILD BLACK BEAR IN NORTH AMERICA SINCE 1900

AVERAGE NUMBER OF HUMAN DEATHS PER YEAR IN THE U.S. FROM 1995 TO 2004 RESULTING FROM ANIMAL-VEHICLE COLLISIONS

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HOW TO STAY ALIVE IN THE WILD



Mexico's Popocatepetl volcano (three times), and Mont Blanc in France (five times). He's even competed in two grueling multi-day Eco-Challenge adventure races.

Now, he's parlayed his experiences into

ROD ALNE has spent the better part of four decades navigating high-pressure situations in some of the world's most demanding and unforgiving locales. He served with the United States Air Force's elite Pararescue units for 27 years, including stints in both Iraq wars and in Afghanistan. He's summited some of the world's tallest peaks, including Mt. Rainier, the Matterhorn in Switzerland, Mt. McKinley (twice),

a career as a Special Operations Forces training instructor based out of Butte, Montana. Since 2005, his The Peak training program has equipped the nation's elite military units, law enforcement, wilderness professionals, and outdoor enthusiasts with the skills they need to survive the most ruthless conditions they can face. Here, Alne shares with us the seven essential survival skills that every outdoorsman should master.



1

BUILD A SMARTER SURVIVAL KIT

You hear stories all the time about a hunter who sets his backpack down and then takes off to close the distance on an elk or deer, but then he gets lost or it gets dark and he can't find his way back to his pack. When it comes to your survival gear, I suggest a three-tier system. The first is worn on your body or carried in pockets in your clothing and includes 30 to 50 feet of 550 paracord braided into a lanyard that you wear around your neck. On that lanyard you carry a signaling device, typically a whistle; a firestarter, which could be a Bic lighter; a small button compass; a

small flashlight; and a small knife. In your pockets are a space blanket, a signal mirror, a small multi-tool, and your cellphone. With those tools, you have things on your person with which you can start a fire, construct a shelter, and signal for help.

The second tier of survival gear can be contained in a fanny pack or small backpack and would include a first-aid kit, a 55-gallon contractor bag, some brightly colored surveyor's tape, maybe some raingear, duct tape, and mini candy bars or granola bars. Your third line goes in your

backpack, and here we're looking at shelter materials or a tarp, maybe a lightweight and compressible sleeping bag, more substantial food like an MRE, a water container, a fixed-blade knife or some type of saw, and additional clothing appropriate for the environment.



2 SPLINT A SPRAIN OR BREAK

Any internal injury to an extremity—sprain or break—should be stabilized with a splint. Before you splint, though, you must check for CSM—circulation, sensation, and motor function. Assuming it's a leg injury, first press down on the nail bed of a toe on the affected leg to check for circulation, making sure it goes white and then back to pink. Flick the bottom of the foot to see if the victim can feel it. To test for motor function, have him move his foot as if he's pressing a gas pedal.

If he has CSM, leave the limb as is and splint it. If there is no CSM, something is seriously

wrong. Apply traction to get a fractured bone back into its natural alignment by pulling above and below the affected area. If you can bring back the CSM, keep the limb stable and splint it in that position.

If you're treating a broken bone, immobilize the joints above and below the fracture. If it's a sprained joint, immobilize the bone above and below. Once you've applied the splint, check for CSM again. Be sure to pad the splint to minimize discomfort. Finally, elevate the limb if possible.



3

TAKE SHELTER FAST

Natural shelters can be fun to build if you're just out messing around, but in a survival situation you want to expend as little energy as possible. Here's where that contractor bag [see No. 1] comes into play. If you must shelter in place for the night, just crawl inside it and you're covered.

(If you can, get an orange one for the added visibility.) The bag acts as a vapor barrier, and you'll generate a lot of heat; however, since it doesn't breathe, be sure to not cinch it tight. Otherwise, condensation will build up inside.

Construct a bed of pine boughs 12 to 16 inches high. That'll get you up off the ground, which can rob you of heat. If you can find dry pine duff, use that to insulate the bag. You have to be able to sleep, and if you're not at least reasonably comfortable, you won't. Set your bed next to your fire, which should be built near something that will reflect the heat back to you—a pile of logs or a rock face. Another option is to cut a face hole in the bag, crouch down, pull it over you, and put a survival candle between your legs. Either way, your goal is to stay at 98.6 degrees, and using fire and shelter together will increase your chances of doing that.

In terms of site selection, watch for broken limbs that could come down on you in a windstorm. Avoid drainages, where water would be an issue. As for elevation, stay low enough to be out of the wind, but up away from cold creek bottoms.



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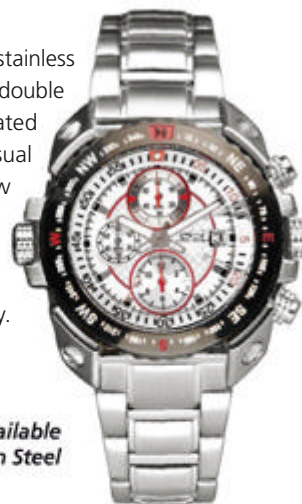
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4

BUILD FIRE IN NASTY CONDITIONS

When the rain is pouring and the wind is howling, starting a fire can be extremely difficult, but it's not impossible. First, find a location out of the wind or build a windbreak to at least eliminate that problem. Cotton balls and char

cloth make great tinder, but my favorite is pitch wood. Look near a stump or a scarred area of a trunk where the sap is oozing out. Pitch wood is super-saturated, heavier and harder than regular pine wood, and smells very strongly of pine. It's brighter, too, almost a golden color. Whatever tinder you use, add some magnesium shavings to accelerate the flame.

A tepee-style fire lay built atop a platform of sticks to get it up off the wet ground is best. Block the wind, use pitch, and build a platform. If you do those three things, you should have a fire going in no time. Pile your larger sticks and logs nearby to dry out.



6

FIND YOUR WAY HOME

If you absolutely have to get out of the woods immediately and your GPS is dead and your compass is broken, you'll have to improvise a method of determining direction. Either of these methods is better than looking for moss on a tree.

First, if you have a watch with hour and minute hands, point the hour hand at the sun and draw a line between it and the 12. For instance, if it's 4 o'clock, your line should go through the 2. That line will point to the south. Hopefully, before you left home you studied the boundaries—the roads and rivers—of the area, so if you hit one as you're walking out, you'll have a sense of where you are.

If you're without a watch, drive a straight stick into the ground in a flat area that gets good sun. Mark the end of the shadow cast by the stick with a small stick or rock. That's going to be your west. As the shadow travels, it's going to move to the east. Pretty soon it'll make a straight line. That's your east-west line. A line perpendicular to that is your north-south line.

Once you figure out which direction you need to go in, find a standing dead tree or a big rock formation in the distance and head toward it. It should be something easily recognizable and constantly visible. Once you get there, reorient yourself, find a new landmark, and keep going. If night falls as you're traveling, mark your cardinal directions in the dirt before you fall asleep so in the morning you immediately know which way to go.

5

GET FOUND

It's always smart to have a loud pealess whistle for attracting attention,

but in a wilderness survival situation, it's most crucial to have a good ground-to-air signal. When setting this, remember the acronym CLASS: contrast, location, angles, size, and shape. Your orange contractor bag or space blanket would provide good contrast in most settings (or pick up a pink-and-



orange VS-17 panel at a military surplus store). Get the signal out in the open where it can be seen. Your signal should incorporate straight lines and 90-degree angles, since those are not normal in nature and will stand out. As for size and shape, bigger is better and unique shapes are more noticeable than common ones.

With regard to other signals, a mirror is great because it can be seen from a long way away, but it's useless at night or if there's cloud cover. Fire is dual purpose—it provides warmth and also attracts attention visually and through the smell of smoke.

7 DEVELOP A SURVIVOR'S MINDSET

We can preemptively eliminate a lot of stress if we put ourselves in the right frame of mind from the outset. Before you even head into the wild, ask yourself two questions: The first is, What scares me most about spending an unplanned night in the wild? Some people are afraid

of missing their family, so they bring along a photo of loved ones to drive them on.

The second question is, What is the worst thing that can happen, and how will I deal with it? Maybe that's freezing to death or becoming injured. In those cases, make sure you've packed enough warm clothing and the proper first aid supplies. If you answer those questions honestly before you

head out, you'll be ready for whatever you might encounter.

It's also important to build a good trip plan and leave it with someone you trust. Leave another in a baggie under your windshield wiper at the trailhead. Doing so will help eliminate fear because you'll know you've done everything you can to help execute a successful rescue if one is needed. 🌲🌲🌲



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Florida researchers have found that bass can learn how to recognize and avoid specific lures.

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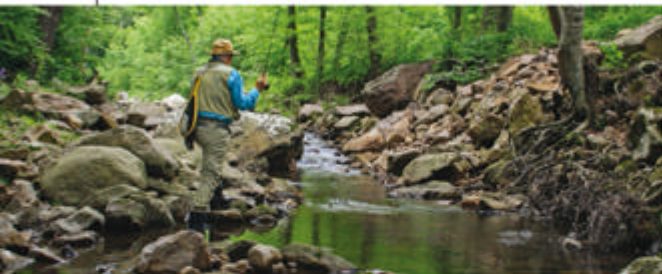
BY HAL SCHRAMM





FISHERIES SCIENTISTS TYPICALLY SEEK

answers to questions that relate to conserving and managing our aquatic resources. While their efforts create better angling opportunities for all, only occasionally do their studies provide information that directly helps anglers catch fish. That's why the latest in game-fish research is so compelling: These studies will help you put more and bigger fish in the boat this season. But be forewarned: You might have to do a little strategic thinking.



FIND YOUR NEXT HOTSPOT

► Small impoundments, such as farm ponds and state-managed lakes of fewer than 1,000 acres, can provide some exceptional angling. But how do you identify the best bodies of water?

Some recent research conducted by Missouri biologists may help you finally find a hotspot. Based on fish population assess-

ments in small Midwestern impoundments ranging from 5 to 1,000 acres, we know that:

LARGEMOUTH BASS are most abundant in clear-water lakes with lots of sunfish. Look for big bass in lakes with few small bass, plentiful bluegills, and shad.

BLUEGILLS are most abundant in clear-water lakes with a strong

CAN BASS REMEMBER LURES?

More than 40 years ago, two studies attributed the declining catch rates of largemouth bass in small ponds to their ability to learn. More recent research has found that fishing quickly affects the trout catch rate, too. However, is it possible for a creature with a brain the size of a No. 22 dry fly to outsmart an angler? A University of Florida study published in 2012 seems to have actually measured the bass learning curve. Graduate students began their investigation by first electro-shocking and tagging 347 bass measuring more than 10 inches. Then they went fishing, plying the waters of a 26-acre lake for 12 days over a four-week period, using only lipless crankbaits and soft stickbaits. The catch rate with the crankbait quickly fell from 2.5 to 0.5 bass per angler hour after only three days of fishing. The catch rate on the stickbait also declined, but much more slowly—from 1.8 bass per angler hour at the start of the experiment to 1 bass per hour after 12 fishing hours. Not only did the bass appear to learn to avoid capture, but they learned to ignore the stimulus-rich rattling crankbait faster than the subtle and silent stickbait. Yes, fishing gets expensive if you want to keep up with the bass learning curve.

WALLEYE WONDERLANDS

Are you more interested in catching big walleyes or a fish box full of keepers? A recent survey of 1,600 walleye anglers conducted by University of Minnesota researchers found that lakes with liberal creel limits, especially for 16- to 20-inch fish, were the most desirable fishing destinations. Regulations designed to create opportunities to catch larger fish—two-fish and slot limits or catch-and-release-only waters—discouraged walleye anglers. Therefore, for big fish, find lakes that have highly restrictive harvest regulations. These regulations tend to reduce fishing effort, too, so you won't have to share the water with the masses.

To further narrow your search for walleye nirvana, follow the forage. Yellow perch are a diet staple for walleyes in most northern lakes. Researchers at Laurentian University in Ontario found that walleyes achieve good growth rates when young perch are abundant, but switch to low-energy invertebrates when perch are scarce. If you are looking for trophy walleyes, go to the Columbia River or the Great Lakes. But if upper Midwest and Canadian lakes are a more likely destination, find those with ciscoes

population of bigger bass. Oversize bluegills are most likely to be found in lakes with copious small bass, few small bluegills, and no shad.

CRAPPIES will be most plentiful in more turbid lakes with shad, but look for big crappies in larger lakes with abundant bass and few crappies and bluegills.

That's all nice to know, but

where do you get this information? Try your fellow fishermen. If you want to catch big bass, go where anglers are complaining about catching small sunfish. If you want to catch big bluegills, go where anglers are whining about a lot of small bass. For big crappies, fish lakes with shad and lots of small bass.



PAN-TASTIC

Research indicates that bass size and population affect bluegill and crappie trophy potential. Panfish grow largest where small bass predominate.



FISH HATCHERIES **PROVIDE NO EVIDENCE** TO SUPPORT THE BELIEF THAT BASS SPAWN DURING ANY PARTICULAR PHASE OF THE MOON.

(tulibee), a species of whitefish. Ciscoes are a high-energy food, and walleyes in lakes with them grow faster and larger. The exception would be the relatively few lakes where the slender, energy-rich ciscoes are too large for the walleyes to eat. Ask local biologists which lakes have ciscoes, and then select those where average cisco length is less than 12 inches.

There is a downside to the cisco connection, however. After you find the right lake, catching walleyes may be tough—they feed less frequently here than in lakes with smaller, lower-energy foods. You will also need to adjust your fishing patterns to match the behavior of ciscoes, which prefer cold water and have a fall-shoreward spawning migration.

TOP TROUT TERRITORIES

Anglers can predict much about the quality of trout fishing by viewing aerial imagery readily available on the Web. In a Maryland study,



for example, brook trout occurrences at a stream site were best predicted by the amount of forested watershed—the more forest there was, the more likely the brook trout would survive. Brookies were absent from stream reaches where more than 4 percent of the watershed was made up of impervious surfaces—paved areas and buildings. When cities grow, forests go, and the brook trout go with them.

In the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, brook trout and rainbow trout were more abundant in streams flowing through old-growth forests that contained more woody material.

In California, it was determined that grazing reduced riparian cover and destabilized stream banks. By simply excluding grazing and allowing riparian regrowth, streams returned to a narrower and deeper condition with more large woody material—streamside forest—that benefited steelhead. Similar advantages to controlling grazing have been found for golden trout in California, cutthroat trout in Wyoming, and other stream-dwelling trout throughout the West, where livestock grazing has altered the riparian zone.

Thus, look for streams with well-vegetated riparian zones, the denser and wider the better. Fine-tune your assessment of a water's trout potential with a windshield survey—without ever wetting a fly.

SHEER LUNACY

Results of a joint study by the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of 342,000 muskie catches found that most fish were taken during full- and new-moon periods. But here's the caveat: Fishing effort was also greater during the full and new moons, and catch-per-angler-hour did not reveal a significant lunar effect. Published last May, this detailed analysis revealed that among all lakes and catches analyzed, anglers who fished the moon experienced a 5 percent increase in catch rate. Put another way, the fish of 10,000 casts becomes the fish of about 9,500 casts.

Many bass anglers often chase the moon-bite, too. However, records at fish hatcheries provide no evidence to support the belief that bass spawn during any particular phase of the moon. At

TROUT COUNTRY

Brushy buffer zones between land and stream are critical to flourishing populations of trout over much of their range. Left, a brookie ready for release.





SNACK ATTACK

Although walleyes achieve good growth rates in lakes where yellow perch are abundant, studies indicate that ciscoes are the true trophy-building forage base.

Mississippi's new state-of-the-art fish hatchery, for example, 80 percent of bass spawning in 2013 and 2014 occurred midway between the full and new moon.

What about catching trophy bass? Although many bass anglers swear by moon-phase fishing, a comparison of lunar cycles with catch submissions of bass 13 pounds and larger in the Texas Share-Lunker Program last year found no relationship whatsoever.

WHACK 'EM IN WOOD

New reservoirs that are rich in fish-attracting structure provide great angling opportunities. But as the habitat deteriorates and woody vegetation decomposes, locating fish becomes a challenge. In many states, management agencies, individual anglers, and fishing clubs have responded by adding cover. These efforts are extremely labor intensive, so fisheries agencies continually assess the value of artificially adding habitat to guide future efforts.

In Table Rock Lake, for example, Missouri Department of Conservation biologists used scuba divers to assess the summertime use of enhanced cover. Researchers discovered that adult bass used structure but were more abundant among hardwood treetops and stumps than in areas of rocks and concrete rubble or clusters of cedar and Christmas trees. Depth had only a small effect on use, and habitat placed below the thermocline was not used at all.

In Striker Reservoir, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists compared the use of different sizes and shapes of sunken Christmas trees. Large bass were more likely to use the cover in the spring and preferred larger chunks of habitat (20 trees versus five) arranged in a circular cluster pattern rather than in a linear pattern. Bluegill abundance was greater in small, cluster-shaped patches of trees in the fall.

If all of this seems confusing, that's because it is. At least a dozen other studies on individual lakes have come to equally perplexing conclusions. Any addition of structure attracts and concentrates fish, but anglers care about catchable fish. A few generalizations emerge from these and other studies when the question is the effect of man-placed structures on the abundance of larger fish:

- Wood concentrates crappies, largemouth bass, and bluegills.
- Artificially placed habitat comprising larger materials and more open spaces are more likely to hold bigger fish.

- Use of this material by fish varies over time and space in different lakes.

So look for large wood structures for bigger fish, but also probe around it to target fish moving in and out of it.

FISH SCI-FI

Finally, consider this pair of tantalizing findings that continue to be studied and will someday affect the way you fish.

Louisiana State University scientist John Caprio and colleagues at Kagoshima University in Japan discovered that sea catfish can detect tiny changes in pH. When animals breathe, they release carbon dioxide that, in water, creates acid conditions. The catfish use the change in pH to locate food hidden in the sediment. Might injecting carbon dioxide into the water someday be used to catch more fish?

There are approximately 25,000 species of fish. A little more than 700 of them are known to produce sound. These include some popular sport fishes in the trout and salmon, catfish, drum, and snapper families. If biologists can use sound to locate spawning areas of red drum, anglers can, too. Don't be surprised if your next boat comes outfitted with a multi-frequency hydrophone to locate fish and determine their motivations. ▲▲▲



DONALD M. JONES

RIDDLES OF THE

WILD TURKEYS ARE NOTORIOUSLY EXACTING ABOUT THEIR CHOICE OF BEDROOMS. THAT INTELLIGENCE WILL PAY OFF SPRING AFTER SPRING /// **BY GERRY BETHGE** /



ROOST

BUT ONCE YOU DISCOVER THEIR ROOST PREFERENCES,
ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN HAND

Peeping woodcock, peeping frogs, drumming grouse: spring harbingers come in many forms. Nothing, however, signals

the arrival of spring like the first gobble of the season. On one sub-freezing late-March morning 15 years ago, my buddy Kevin Kilgore and I were determined to be ready to greet it. Spring unofficially arrived shortly before 6 a.m. as we stood along a snow-encrusted field edge. I owl hooted.

"There's that son of a gun," Kilgore said, pointing to a hilltop a quarter mile distant. "Been in the same dang tree since Ma Thompson died. That's the first time I heard him. Can't tell you how many days I've hunted him. There's no calling him in!"

It wasn't until I calculated the years since Ma's passing that I came to a realization that has forever changed my spring turkey hunting strategy.

"Hey, Kev," I wisecracked. "She died 10 years ago, bro. You can't call him in cause he's stone-deaf." I'm not sure that Kevin ever got my point.

I'm no turkey biologist, but the likelihood of a gobbler living to see its 10th birthday anywhere in the country is pretty low. Kevin hadn't found a freak of nature; he had stumbled upon something far better: the perpetual roost, a topographical anomaly that because of a variety of factors—food, terrain, hen-nesting cover, and even acoustics—draws gobblers to it every season. Perpetual roosts exist in every region of turkey country. Find one or two and you're not just in great shape for a dynamite spring hunt, but you might not ever have to scout again.

THE HOLLER

HILLS THAT RESONATE RAUCOUS SPRING
GOBBLING LIKE A NATURAL AMPHITHEATER
PLAY A KEY ROLE IN THIS ROOST SITE

WHY BIRDS LOVE IT Gobbling acoustics (I'm not sure whether anyone's ever studied this phenomenon or not) play a prominent role in this roost's popularity. Dominant toms—one or two each season—typically perch in the mature white pines and hemlocks on the ridgetop point (1) while gathering hens in the pre- and early season. Sound (aka gobbling) resonates in the bowl-shaped surrounding woods like it does in a great concert hall. The “hellion of the hillside,” as one turkey hunter referred to a tom that once roosted here, could yodel once and let the world know that he was king of his domain.

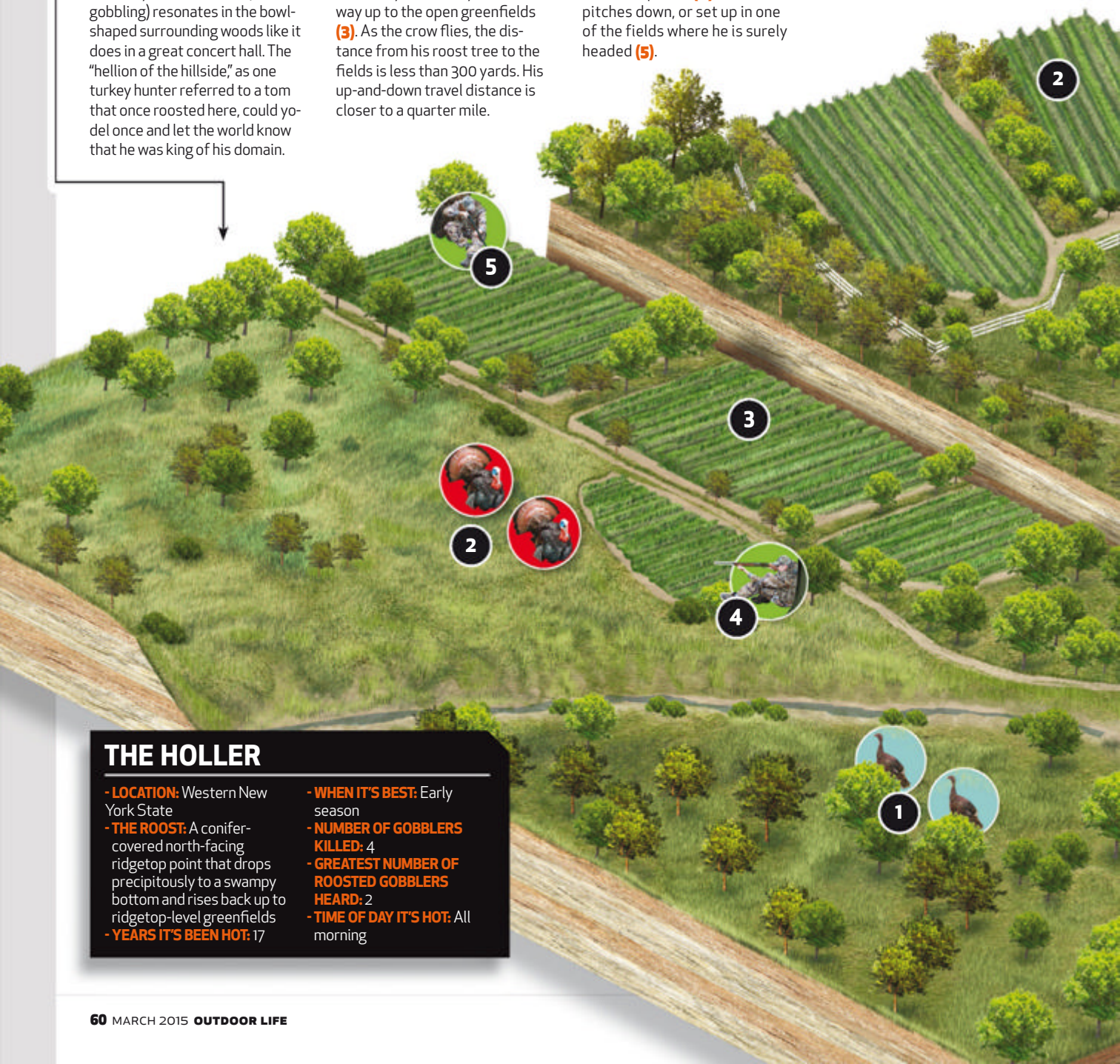
TYPICAL TURKEY TRAVEL

The dominant gobbler often lingers in the treetops long after other toms have flown down, as if in defiance of the up-and-comers. When he is good and ready, this gobbler will pitch off the hill and down into the open swampy bottom below (2), where he will strut, gobble occasionally, and slowly work his way up to the open greenfields (3). As the crow flies, the distance from his roost tree to the fields is less than 300 yards. His up-and-down travel distance is closer to a quarter mile.

HOW TO HUNT IT Old-school turkey tactics tell you to set up above or at the same elevation as a gobbling tom. That won't do you much good with this longbeard; there is no above, and if you get to his level, you will blow him out of his roost. There are only two ways to take this bird: Set up in the swamp field (4) where he pitches down, or set up in one of the fields where he is surely headed (5).

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

If this bird doesn't come barnstorming in shortly after fly-down, fire up the ThermoCell to ward off the blackflies, keep your calls in your vest, and stake out some dekes. Patience will pay off when killer calling goes unheeded.



THE HOLLER

- **LOCATION:** Western New York State
- **THE ROOST:** A conifer-covered north-facing ridgetop point that drops precipitously to a swampy bottom and rises back up to ridgetop-level greenfields
- **YEARS IT'S BEEN HOT:** 17
- **WHEN IT'S BEST:** Early season
- **NUMBER OF GOBBLERS KILLED:** 4
- **GREATEST NUMBER OF ROOSTED GOBBLERS HEARD:** 2
- **TIME OF DAY IT'S HOT:** All morning

THE ROAD DITCH

GOBBLERS OFTEN CHOOSE ROOSTS FOR QUICK ACCESS TO STRUT ZONES. THESE BIRDS HAVE THEIR CHOICE OF TWO

WHY BIRDS LOVE IT The abandoned logging road (1), which cuts directly through the center of this roost site, is the key here. It's an easy conduit for travel between two greenfields at either end where gobblers go to strut for hens. Even better, one of the greenfields is on private land (2) that is closed to hunting, which affords birds

a protected zone for loafing and breeding during the mid-morning and afternoon. (Yes, sometimes "Posted" signs can be used as part of your turkey-hunting tactics.) Thick nesting cover lies within a quarter mile of the roost. Forestland acoustics might also play a part in this roost's popularity. On calm days, these birds can be heard from a half mile away.

TYPICAL TURKEY TRAVEL

Toms, sometimes three or four, predictably roost within 200

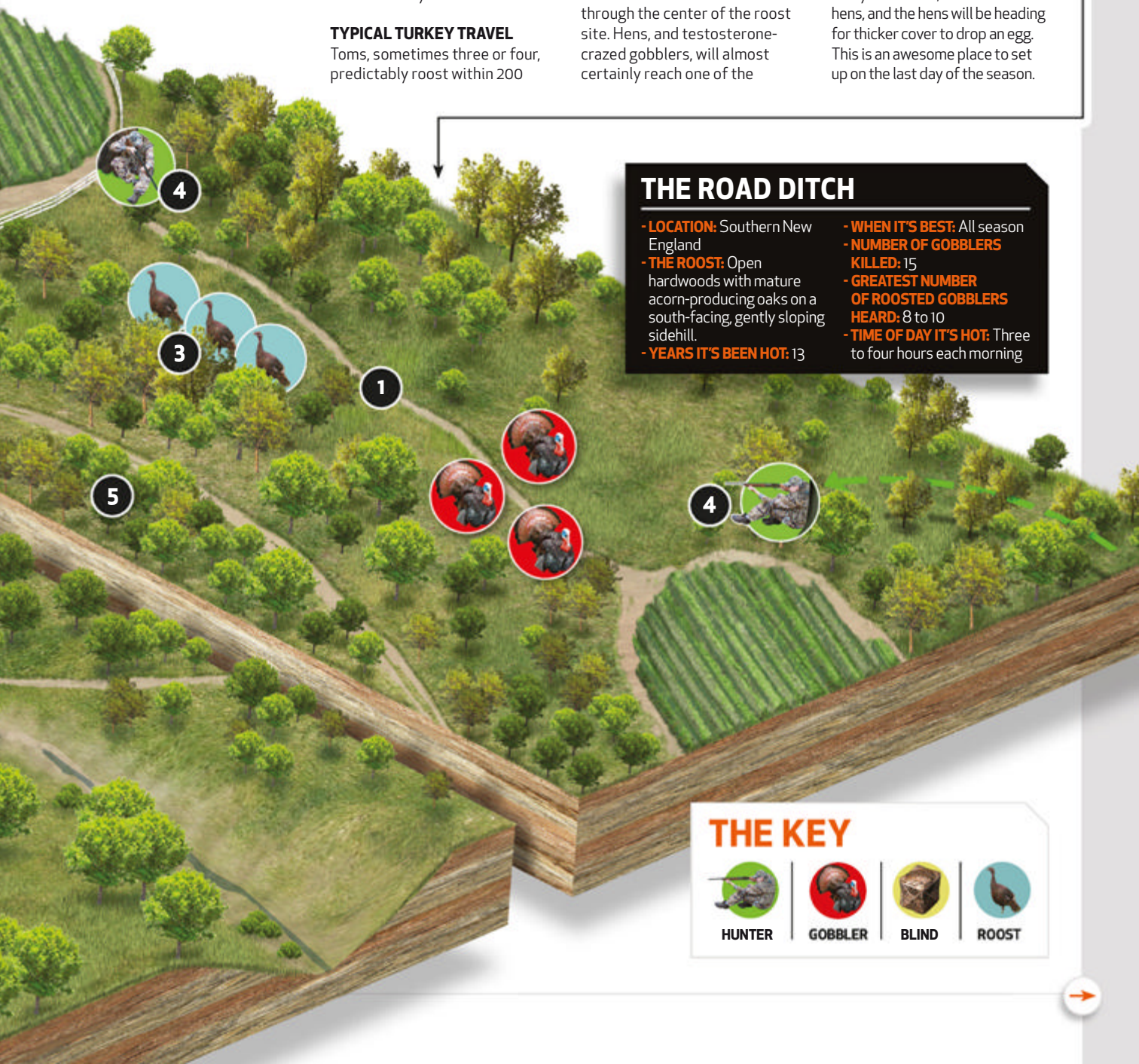
yards of the logging road each evening (3). At flydown, the birds pitch to the road, where they linger and strut for hens or else follow hens to either greenfield, where they continue to strut with the hope of servicing females.

HOW TO HUNT IT An ultra-cautious approach is critical here. Be careful not to bust through the center of the roost site. Hens, and testosterone-crazed gobblers, will almost certainly reach one of the

greenfields and use the logging road to get there. Setting up 50 or so yards off the corner (4) of either field will pay off even if birds are not gobbling.

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

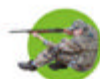
As the season progresses, and hens begin to lay, setting up near the nesting area (5) is a killer strategy. Gobblers here, and everywhere else, will follow the hens, and the hens will be heading for thicker cover to drop an egg. This is an awesome place to set up on the last day of the season.



THE ROAD DITCH

- **LOCATION:** Southern New England
- **THE ROOST:** Open hardwoods with mature acorn-producing oaks on a south-facing, gently sloping sidehill.
- **YEARS IT'S BEEN HOT:** 13
- **WHEN IT'S BEST:** All season
- **NUMBER OF GOBBLERS KILLED:** 15
- **GREATEST NUMBER OF ROOSTED GOBBLERS HEARD:** 8 to 10
- **TIME OF DAY IT'S HOT:** Three to four hours each morning

THE KEY



HUNTER



GOBBLER



BLIND



ROOST





CREEK BOTTOM

A FARM-COUNTRY
SUPER ROOST

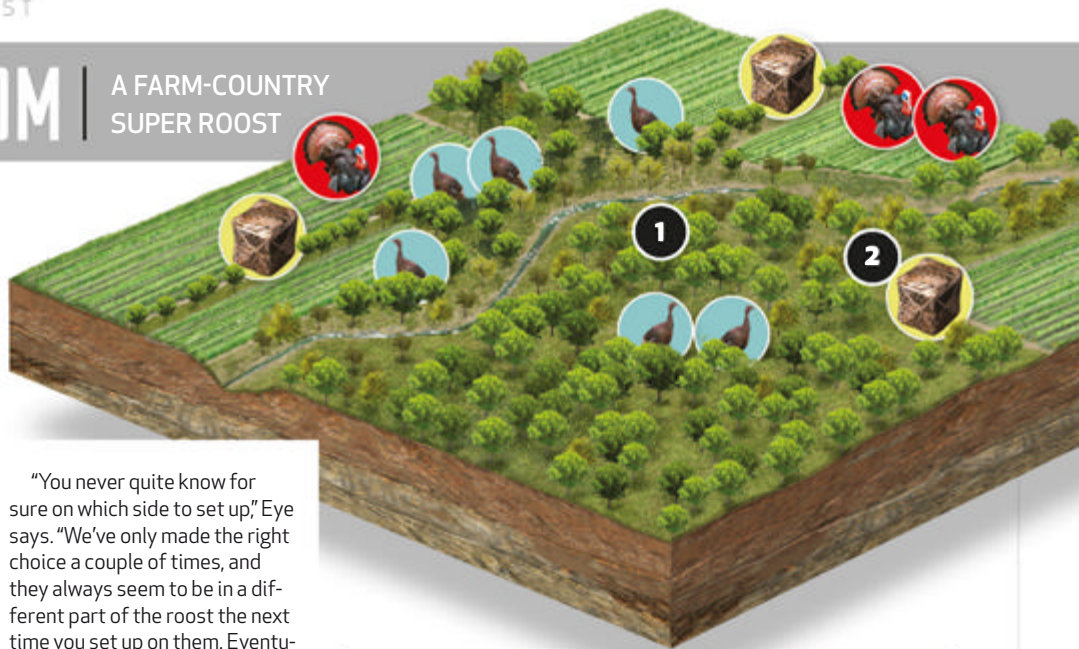
WHY BIRDS LOVE IT Landowner Frank Imo first discovered this enigmatic perpetual roost site in 2000, and he's been hunting it with his buddy, turkey-hunting legend Ray Eye, ever since. Home of Chop Gobble—a tom with an easily recognizable staccato voice—this roost area is composed of mature timber and, perhaps most important, nearby nesting cover (1), and has great acoustics (gobbling birds can be heard from a county road a mile away). Turkeys do not linger near the roost site for more than a couple of hours after flydown, dispersing to parts unknown for the rest of the day.

HOW TO HUNT IT The riddles of this roost are many, according to Eye. Though he's gone so far as to set up three blinds (2) on three sides of the roost, gobblers here often grow quiet as soon as they hit the ground.

"You never quite know for sure on which side to set up," Eye says. "We've only made the right choice a couple of times, and they always seem to be in a different part of the roost the next time you set up on them. Eventually some gobbler will make the wrong move—unless he's Chop Gobble. We've been trying to kill him for six years."

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

When you're hunting a studly, mature gobbler, slink into position—within 50 yards of his roost tree—a full hour before flydown.



CREEK BOTTOM

- **LOCATION:** Central Missouri
- **THE ROOST:** A flat, open farm creek bottom interspersed with mature oaks and sycamores.
- **YEARS IT'S BEEN HOT:** 14
- **WHEN IT'S BEST:** All season
- **NUMBER OF GOBBLERS KILLED:** Several
- **GREATEST NUMBER OF ROOSTED GOBBLERS HEARD:** 50 (in winter)
- **TIME OF DAY IT'S HOT:** Early morning only



BLACK HILLS RIDGELINE

A ROOST IN THE SHADOW
OF DEVIL'S TOWER



BLACK HILLS RIDGELINE

- **LOCATION:** Northeastern Wyoming
- **THE ROOST:** Mature ponderosa pines
- **YEARS IT'S BEEN HOT:** 14
- **WHEN IT'S BEST:** All season
- **NUMBER OF GOBBLERS KILLED:** 3 or 4 each spring
- **GREATEST NUMBER OF ROOSTED GOBBLERS HEARD:** Several
- **TIME OF DAY IT'S HOT:** All morning

WHY BIRDS LOVE IT Merriam's turkeys consistently select clumps of mature ponderosa pines (1) for roosting, and the open-branched ridgetop conifers on Mike Schmid's Solitude Ranch in the Devil's Tower region of the Black Hills is a perpetual roost that pays off with several gobblers each spring.

"I have many areas like this

on the ranch, but this is one of my favorites," says Schmid. "These turkeys like to be near the ridgetops, and the pines provide plenty of cover. The appeal of these spots also lies in the turkeys' ability to see their landing areas (2) clearly and to pick up the first streaks of daylight in the east."

TYPICAL TURKEY TRAVEL

Gobblers and hens spread across the roost on top of the ridges and pitch down to the highly used strutting and feeding grounds in the lower-elevation creek bottom (3).

HOW TO HUNT IT Putting too much pressure on the roost area can bust a hunt. Setting up either against a tree or in a blind in the strutting area is a tactic that has paid off season after season for Schmid and his clients.

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

Sneak into the small park-like openings among the ridgetop pines when the wind is up. 🌲🌲🌲

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Mike Bucca with his
swimbait creation,
the Bull Shad.

HOT LURES

BASEMENT BAIT MASTERS

✚ They started like most lure makers do: tinkering in boats and basements, in garages with tools and crude designs. They created a Frankenlure, usually ugly at first or maybe not even functional. They trimmed here and there, added this and that, tried to make it effective, and started over again. And then it worked. Their creation caught fish. Word got out. More friends wanted lures. Then strangers, via emails and calls. Suddenly, everything went from zero to 60. **BY ALAN CLEMONS**

M

Mike Bucca (bullshad.com) has tinkered with lures for three decades—ever since he took his first clients out in the Louisiana marsh as a 14-year-old. A guide friend had overbooked, Bucca's knowledge of the marsh was solid, and the fishermen he guided that day enjoyed a 20-redfish and 150-trout day. Bucca was hooked, so to speak, on being paid to fish, or at least do something in the fishing industry.

About a decade ago, after moving to northern Alabama, he began tinkering with his Doo Dad spinnerbait creation to fashion what he called the Bull Shad swimbait. He had guided briefly on the Tennessee River, targeting the notoriously difficult bass of Lake Allatoona, but he wanted to catch bigger largemouths and spotted bass there—bigger than 2 or 3 pounds. Instead of downsizing, as many anglers would do, Bucca upsized. Supersized, actually, to 6-, 8-, and 9-inch Bull Shad hard, jointed swimbaits.

Bucca began by painstakingly carving his Bull Shads by hand, attaching the metal connections in the joint and adding a stiff brush tail along with big, vivid eyes. He looked at gizzard shad photos and actual fish. Trial and error, with the lures and presentations in the water, led to hours upon hours of refinement. Before long, he was trying them on other lakes and sending them to friends to fish.

His first Bull Shad “swam like a flounder, on its side,” he says. “It was a very long and expensive learning curve on not only what worked, but what didn't work. I taught myself everything and really didn't have anyone to





Clockwise: Bucca's Bull Shad is available in three sizes; Ryan Coleman's Mini-Me; Bucca preps lure components; Phil Hunt's Crazy Ace; Bucca checks his molds.

walk me through the steps."

But Bucca knew that giant bass ate giant baits. If they ate them in California, where legends such as Mike Long caught 15-pounders, big lures could work on Southeastern lakes for huge largemouths, magnum spots, big smallmouths, and striped bass.

His first baits each took hours to create. Today, Bucca has molds that turn out 85 resin-bodied baits at a time before the finishing touches are added. He's well acquainted with his delivery-service drivers. Bucca has stopped guiding and now employs a team of six who help him create Bull Shads, which he's shipped to every state except Alaska and every continent except Antarctica. Australians use them to catch barramundi.

"My goal was to make swim-baits for myself and some clients to fish with on my guide trips," he says. "Never in a million years did I think I could earn a living off of making and designing swimbaits. But they worked and the business grew from there."

SPIN TO WIN

► Ryan Coleman is a fishing guide on Lake Lanier in northeastern Georgia and owner of SpotSticker baits (spotsticker.com). About a year ago he bought SOB Lures from the widow of the late Bill Dee of Texas. Dee's famed spinnerbaits had a regional reputation for reliability and durability; the hard clear-coat finish doesn't crack or fade. Coleman wanted to keep that reputation and name alive to honor Dee and because he'd had a role in developing one of SOB's most popular lures, the Mini-Me spinnerbait.

"On Lanier, with the clear water, I like smaller spinnerbaits but want to keep them deeper," he says. "I would hold a bullet weight with pliers and use a band saw to cut a slit in it, and then clamp or glue it to the spinnerbait wire behind the head. We would have a small bait but could work it fast for a reaction

bite. I sent some to Bill, because he was known for creating custom baits and colors, and he said that's what we needed to do. That's how the Mini-Me got started.

"Everyone really respected the name and what Bill did. There weren't a lot of people like him, but the world needs more Bill Dees. I wanted to keep that momentum going."

ACE IN THE HOLE

► Phil Hunt of Indiana, founder of PH Lures (phcustomlures.com), was like Dee. He had been painting custom lures for anglers for years but wanted to make his own crankbaits. In 2006 Hunt began turning out shallow runners, square-bill designs, and deep divers. He fished regularly, saw what worked and what didn't, and began cultivating a list of clients who wanted his special baits.

One of his friends is Bill Lowen, a pro angler on the Bassmaster Elite Series. Fishing on the Ohio River is tough, so to have something extra in the tackle box that might land another bass or three is critical. One weird-looking bait would sputter and spritz. But it would also walk the dog, that subtle slashing maneuver bass can't resist. Lowen loved it. Hunt loved it. He tinkered some more until they got what is now the Crazy Ace.

Not all lure makers achieve such success. Some fail, and some stay under the radar. Others go from the garage to the penthouse. Coleman bought SpotSticker in 2010 from two Alabama owners and now offers jigs, jigheads, and the SOB Lures line. Bucca's Bull Shads have won several tournaments and helped Brett Preuett win the Carhartt Bassmaster College Series championship and a berth in the 2015 Bassmaster Classic. Hunt's lures are gaining a foothold among tournament and weekend anglers alike. All have a common thread: They started with a dream and didn't quit.

NOT ALL LURE MAKERS ACHIEVE SUCCESS. SOME FAIL, AND SOME STAY UNDER THE RADAR. OTHERS GO FROM THE GARAGE TO THE PENTHOUSE.



FLW bass pro Wesley Strader breaks out the push pole to help him maneuver through a timber-littered reservoir backwater.

more in the water. The stuff he sees is troubling enough, but those hidden growlers can ruin his day in a hurry.

"I don't want to run across a pile of rocks, so if I'm not familiar with the spot, I use my push pole to feel if the bottom is composed of rocks, soft mud, or sand," he says. "I want to know if there are any underwater hazards and avoid tearing up my boat."

• IDENTIFY DEPTH CHANGES:

Knowing where the cuts, troughs, and ditches sit is important for navigational planning, as well as for identifying potential fish-aggregating areas.

• FOLLOW FLUCTUATIONS:

Arkansas angler Mark Rose makes sure he can get into and out of any spot he wants to fish, from a reservoir's fall drawdown to the daily variations of tidal waters, by first traversing questionable areas with the push pole. Strader agrees, noting that if he can sneak in on the lowest level, he knows he'll be fine when the water rises.

POLING PROFICIENCY

Aside from its lack of poling platforms, a fiberglass bass boat simply takes far more steam to push about than an aluminum flats skiff. Regardless of vessel size, effective poling requires an equal blend of force and finesse.

Where you stand depends on your objective. For basic navigation over longer stretches, you want to be astern. When you're sight-fishing, perch on the nose and pole side-to-side as needed to inch along stealthily.

Remember that pushing from the stern imparts inverse action on the bow. Push to the right, the stern swings left and the bow moves right. Stand on the nose and it's all straightforward: Push right and the bow moves left.

POLE PARTICULARS

Strader's pole of choice is a telescoping fiberglass Super Stick that extends from 6 to 12 feet; he'll only go full-length when he needs to make a long reach or if a deeply silted bottom requires the whole pole for solid contact.

Telescoping aluminum poles offer an affordable option. Or a simple wooden dowel or capped PVC pipe can handle basic push-pole duties. Just make sure you include a "foot" design—a T- or Y-shaped terminus that provides greater surface area when you're shoving against wet, slick objects.

Finally, wrapping a push pole's top end with tape improves your grip and eliminates the risk of splinters and blisters.

THE RIGHT APPROACH

TAKE A PAGE OUT OF THE BAHAMIAN FLATS-FISHING GUIDEBOOK AND LEARN HOW TO POLE YOUR WAY TO MONSTER LARGEMOUTHS **BY DAVID A. BROWN**

Timber-strewn reservoir backwaters couldn't be any further removed from idyllic Bermuda bonefish flats, yet a growing number of largemouth bass lovers are now propelling their boats in a manner found on the flats: using the modest push pole. Whether utilized independently or in conjunction with a trolling motor, these lanky beams of fiberglass, metal, wood, or PVC give anglers the ability to stealthily approach bass in structure-filled waters. This is crucial when bass are on spring spawning beds, but it will help you lower the boom on wary fish the rest of the season as well. Here's how.

• **BE A SNEAK:** When sight-fishing bedding bass or frogging shallow, weedy waters, Tennessee FLW pro Wesley Strader often forgoes his trolling motor and Power Poles, opting instead to silently push his boat into a specific casting position. Avoiding making noise, however, is only one of his concerns.

"In a lot of lakes, the bottom is silty, and if you blow out the spot when you're sight-fishing, you have to wait 10 to 15 minutes to see the fish again," Strader says. Louisiana pro Jim Dillard agrees.

"Take a big bed of hyacinth, for example," says Dillard. "If you use a trolling motor, you risk spooking the fish completely—especially if they're already finicky. It's better to just push-pole 10 to 15 feet, flip around, push-pole another 10 to 15 feet, and flip all around again."

Push-pole positioning can be particularly advantageous on those bluebird days following a cold front. Ultra-clear skies and intense sunlight send bass deep into cover, where they're even less tolerant of intrusion.

• **GET A FEEL FOR THE BOTTOM:** Bumping your boat on a log or a stump is one thing; hitting rock or concrete is quite another. If Strader approaches a creek, canal, or slough awash with natural rock or crumbling concrete, he assumes there's

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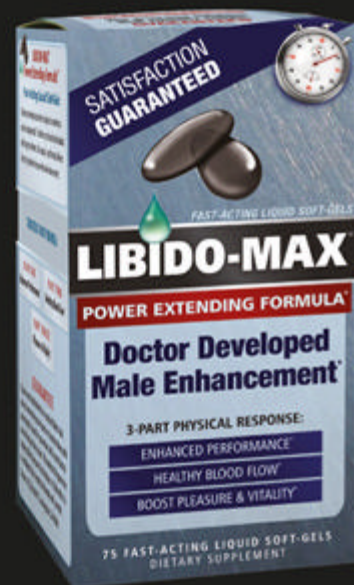
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The author lands a 44-inch northern on Minnesota's Lake of the Woods.

When you are standing on an ice sheet that's 36 inches thick, it seems absurd to think that spring is in the air. But it was. And I could feel it.

It was the last week of March, and Pete Palony and I had planned our trip to Minnesota's famed Lake of the Woods to be here at this precise time. This sprawling inland sea is home to massive numbers of huge pike.

The first flag went off a half hour into the day. A pike attacked a live sucker pinned 6 feet off the bottom in 14 feet of water. Within minutes, 14 pounds of thrashing fish hit the ice. We released it after a couple of quick photos.

Then one of the cisco-baited tip-ups went off. I set the hook, and it felt as if I was tethered to a moving truck. The fish exploded in an impressive run; for a few seconds I worried that my 50 yards of main line might not be stout enough.

The pike made three long

COURTESY OF STEVE PENNAZ

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runs before I could coax its massive head through the 10-inch hole. When the tip of its nose appeared out of the slush, I reached in to grab a gill plate.

You have to stand up to lift 44 inches of pike from a hole in the ice.

PIKE PERCEPTIONS

► Although one look at a pike's toothy maw confirms that it evolved to feed on other fish, here's what you may not know about northerns: They are scavengers that feed on dead stuff, too. And in late winter, there are plenty of dead things in the shallow back bays of lakes that see oxygen levels plummet over the long winter.

Embracing this part of pike behavior was difficult for me. As I learned to target big pike, however, I started to understand the significant differences between hammer-handle fish and studs.

The use of underwater cameras like the Aqua-Vu Micro AV

has accelerated my learning. For example, I've discovered that big pike are attracted to vertically jigged rattle baits and will travel hundreds of feet to investigate them. Flutter spoons are similarly enticing. These thin spoons are very popular with the Great Lakes trollers that target trout and salmon. Unlike traditional spoons, these light baits sink slowly on the drop, attracting pike as they flutter down. Rig these lures in tandem with live or dead baits.

Both dead and live baits produce below tip-ups. A quick-strike rig will not only allow you to safely release fish, but it will also greatly improve your strike-to-hookup rate. I use 40-pound fluorocarbon for my leader, with about 30 inches between my main line and the bait. Smaller trebles—I use No. 4 almost exclusively—offer better landing rates than larger ones. Thin, uncoated seven-strand wire is also a popular leader material for preventing bite-offs by

toothy pike. Most anglers I know use 18- to 27-pound-test to build their rigs.

I like a thick, strong main line for giant pike. You don't need 50-pound-test to land them, but heavier lines are easiest to handle with cold, wet hands. Berkley's Gorilla Braid is made with both Dyneema and Dacron,

► Follow the bait to find big late-season fish. In waters with a strong panfish forage base, seek out the shallow bays that attract them and you'll find pike. ► In waters dominated by open-water forage such as whitefish, shallower rocky points can be great pike spots, particularly near spawning areas.

“THE PIKE MADE **THREE LONG RUNS** BEFORE I COULD COAX ITS MASSIVE HEAD **THROUGH THE HOLE.**”

and it offers the best characteristics of both. It not only sinks, but it's also easy to control and can withstand the sharp edges that form around ice holes.

PIKE POINTERS

► Late-season pike roam much higher in the water column than most anglers realize. Often, my best baits are those pinned just a foot or two below the ice.

► Because current attracts and concentrates fish, incoming creeks and rivers are a plus. ► If you are not finding fish shallow, focus on pike staging areas, like deep water close to spawning bays. ► Once you hook a giant, allow it to run. The last thing you want is a green fish at the bottom of the hole, where it could bury your hooks into the ice.



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HIGH-TECH VS. OLD SCHOOL

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A BLUE CAT. THESE TWO EXPERTS MIGHT NOT AGREE ON MUCH, BUT YOU CAN'T ARGUE ABOUT THEIR PROFICIENCY AT PUTTING BIG FISH IN THE BOAT **BY JAMES HALL**

Catfishing has come a long way, baby. Once upon a time—like five years ago—the most common approach to catching all species whiskered was to sit on a bucket and throw something stinky in the water. Now, tournament catfishermen (yes, there are high-dollar derbies for catfish) are employing remote-controlled trolling motors, drift socks, side-imaging sonar, and complicated rigs to target blue cats.

We talked to two veteran catfish gurus who use a combination of old-school and high-tech methods. However, we forced each to pick a side and detail his most productive tactic.

■ **OUTDOOR LIFE:** What is the best way to locate blue cats on a massive fishery?

CHAD FERGUSON: If you are talking about fall through winter, it's pretty simple where I live. All you have to do is drive around a lake and see where the cormorants are roosting. Wherever there are roosting cormorants, there will be a wad of catfish.

JEFF DODD: The first thing I do is turn on my Lowrance HD10 Gen2 sonar and scroll to the mapping page. I'll look for hard edges, like ledges and other structure in deep water. If that is in an area where current is present, I'll drive over it with my sonar and downscan. If I mark a single fish, I'll go back and try to catch it.

■ **OL:** Why, exactly, are the fish there?

CF: Where cormorants roost, half-digested shad plo p into the water all night, creating a turd buffet for catfish. It's kind of nasty but, man, it attracts fish.

JD: Big blues, which are what I prefer to target, use deep edges like a guardrail on a highway. They kind of run into the wall and let it guide them up and down the river or lake. If there is a submerged tree or deep hole where they can stop and rest, even better.

■ **OL:** Once you locate fish, what is the strategy to catch them?

CF: Position your boat as far away from the roost as you can while still being able to

make a cast to the base of the trees. Make a high, overhand cast so the bait splats on the surface. The fish respond as much to the noise as they do to the bait.

JD: Once I mark a fish, I set a drift using my MinnKota iPilot trolling motor. This remote-controlled electric allows me to set a very specific drift speed, which I can measure on the Lowrance unit. You want to drift half as fast as the current is running and follow the edge as it meanders around.

■ **OL:** What is your tackle and bait choice?

CF: I prefer baitcasting gear with 50-pound braid and a 40-pound fluorocarbon leader. Load a treble with punch bait on a bobber and lob it toward the birds.

JD: I prefer to walk a three-way rig when drift-fishing using heavy-duty baitcasting gear. This is simply a 2- to 8-ounce sinker (the weight depends on current and depth) 18 inches below a 13/0 Daiichi improved circle hook, which is on an 18- to 30-inch fluorocarbon leader. Fresh cut skipjack is the bait I prefer.

HIGH-TECH

☒ **JEFF DODD, 51, from Trenton, Tennessee, is a farmer by trade, but he has been fishing for catfish since he can remember. Dodd used to sit on a creek bank soaking stink bait, but he is now addicted to high-tech approaches. He has won seven catfish tournaments since 2006.**

OLD SCHOOL

☒ **CHAD FERGUSON, 41, of Fort Worth, Texas, is a lifelong catfisherman who has owned Catfish Edge Guide Service (catfishedge.com) since 1998. He loves new, cutting-edge tactics but stands by traditional practices.**



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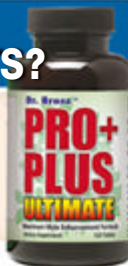
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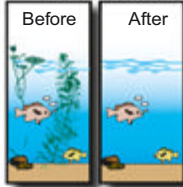
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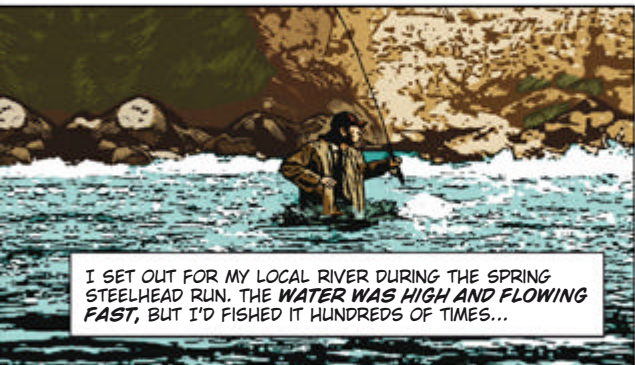
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